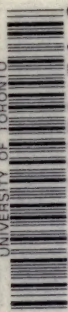


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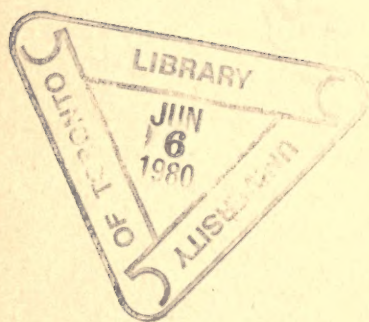
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W. DOUGLAS NEWTON

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TO
MY MOTHER AND FATHER

PREFACE

BY FATHER R. H. BENSON

THIS book will be called sensational and disgusting. That is precisely what it is, because it is an account of the sensational and disgusting thing called *War*; at least it is an account of a few such incidents as any single individual, with reasonable powers of activity and observation, might easily see and experience should his country be invaded by another of the same degree of civilization as his own. It does not pretend to give statistics of the general ruin and devastation which must fall upon such a country; or of the death-roll; or of the years of misery and poverty that must follow: it does not describe the purely internal horrors that would certainly take place in our larger towns; it merely pictures the kind of thing which we should all witness, so long as we survived ourselves, in the familiar lanes and fields and

villages of our deep country-side—in the lanes and villages, where the passing of one of our own good-tempered, well-behaved soldiers now causes something of a sensation.

Next, it must be observed that the commanding officer of the invading army is represented as being, on the whole, a restrained and disciplined gentleman, with his full share of compassion and humanity. He is not personally vindictive or tyrannical. He is merely doing what we should all—in parallel circumstances—consider to be his duty : his misfortune lies in having, for the performance of that duty, the instrument called *War*. There are, of course, other instruments at the disposal of the human race for the adjusting of differences : one is diplomacy ; another is self-restraint ; another is preparedness ; a fourth is religion. But if these fail, there appears to be only War left. Now it is impossible to say that religion has failed, since the exact effect of it upon civilization generally is not capable of being codified ; but it is certainly true to say that Christianity,

as a whole, is not playing that overt part in pacification which might have been expected of it. Attempts, indeed, are being made to organize its forces ; but these, owing largely to the lamentable divisions amongst Christians, are greatly nullified. Again, with regard to diplomacy, it is equally impossible to judge accurately : it is a force that must work, inevitably, behind the scenes. Yet such glimpses of its energy as we have seen in the last thirty years, are not very reassuring. . . . There remain self-restraint and preparedness. As regards the former, we cannot very cordially congratulate ourselves. It is said, of course, that the Jingo Press is responsible ; but who is responsible for the Jingo Press ? Certainly not its directors. Men do not make their fortunes by journalism, unless they reflect the minds of their clients. It is, indeed, actually their duty to do so. As regards preparedness—well, I suppose no man, unless he be actually insane with party politics, or some other form of blind and complacent egotism, could describe the

English nation as being prepared for war, in any single department of that savage service. It is not in the least a question of this War Minister or that, of the Government or the Opposition ; for Cabinets and War Ministers, like directors of newspapers, are not nearly so much the leaders as the humble camp-followers of the nation. The fact is that nations, which have real personalities as well as characters of their own, are ultimately responsible for their own destinies ; and our own nation, at present, appears to be more interested in cinemas and art-balls and land campaigns than in any final destiny whatever.

Well, then, War is left, in the last resort ; and War will certainly come ; not because any other nation is particularly jealous or overbearing, or because we are, but because civilized Europe at present will not take the pains to secure that those adjustments, necessary from time to time between all nations, shall be arranged by gentler methods. It cannot possibly do us any harm, then, to understand what War

PREFACE

xi

means ; to see, in imagination, our villages devastated, our farmers shot down, our food-supply destroyed, our self-respect ruined, our women outraged, our children trampled down. It may even do us good ; for it may persuade us, perhaps, to reconsider the situation once more. It is my sincere hope that this faithful, patient and eloquent picture of reality may be translated into at least three European languages.

ROBERT HUGH BENSON



CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. LANDING	1
II. THE PRISONERS	10
III. THREE COLUMNS	19
IV. THE VILLAGE THAT STOOD IN THE PATH	31
V. AFTER	49
VI. THREE FIELD LABOURERS AND THE AFFAIR OF THE OUTPOSTS	60
VII. WAITING	71
VIII. THE BATTLE: THE BEGINNING	85
IX. THE BATTLE: GENERAL ENGAGEMENT	89
X. THE BATTLE: THE END	106
XI. ROUT	112
XII. VÆ VICTIS	121
XIII. FLIGHT	136
XIV. SIEGE	142
XV. SHELLING	155
XVI. IN THE TRACK OF ARMIES	172
XVII. GUERRILLA FIGHTING	179
XVIII. THE VILLAGE THAT HELD GUERRILLAS	191
XIX. THE GUERRILLAS THEY CAUGHT	207
XX. RAPE	218
XXI. DEATH	228



RUDYARD KIPLING

It is almost as impossible to make a people who have never known invasion realize what invasion is as it is to make a man realize the fact of his own death. The nearest a man can come in imagination to his own death is the idea of lying in a coffin with his eyes shut listening to the pleasant things he thinks his neighbours are saying about him ; and the nearest that a people who have never known conquest or invasion can come to the idea of conquest and invasion is a hazy notion of going about their usual work and paying their taxes to tax collectors who will perhaps talk with a slightly foreign accent. Even attempted invasion does not mean that ; it means riot and arson and disorder and bloodshed and starvation on a scale that a man can scarcely imagine to himself ; it means disorganization of every relation of life and every walk of business from the highest to the lowest, and the more elaborate the civilization the more awful will be the disorganization—in other words, what the Balkan States can stand for twelve months and still breathe would knock us out of time in six weeks.

It seems to me that if there is a reasonable chance—and I think there is—of such a catastrophe overtaking us, we ought at least to take reasonable precautions to make any attempted invasion so exceedingly expensive

to begin with and so particularly unpleasant to go on with, that no enemy would think of facing the risk. As things stand at present we have neither the men nor the means nor the organization nor the will to produce such results. That is why those of us who think go about in fear and in doubt ; that is why those of us who do not think are full of silly boastings one day and of blind panic the next ; that is why we have no security inside or outside our borders ; that is why we tell each other lies to cover our own fears and yet know all the time that our lies are useless.

In this matter we must take refuge behind no self-paid member of Parliament. The power to change this wasteful state of affairs lies in the hands of the people of England. The responsibility is ours and the punishment if we persist in our folly, in our fraud, and in our make-believe—the punishment will fall not only upon us but upon the third and fourth generation of those that have betrayed their country.

RUDYARD KIPLING

(By Permission)

WAR

CHAPTER I

LANDING

THE beach and the flat grass plain which made the foreshore were full of men in khaki.

These men were running and stopping and running on again. Occasionally they dropped down upon their bellies and fired off raking volleys. The sound their rifles made was like the tearing of very obstinate and very tough packing-cloth. It was shrill, piercing, edgy.

To Rafael Brun, sitting amazed, horrified but safe on his stationary motor-cycle, on a hill half a mile away, the movements of these men suggested the movements of ants. The men swarmed and scurried in a jerky, insectile fashion. They were like ants who had a definite purpose in view, but any amount of obstacles to surmount before that purpose could be justly consummated.

A low sweep of clifflike hills blocked the way

of these running creatures. Towards these hills they pushed feverishly, unfalteringly. From the summits of these hills there arose an incessant and nervous firing of rifles. There were many men on the hills who had set themselves the supreme task of keeping the feverish plain-men back from the sacred summits. Always, however, the firing seemed to convey to Brun an impression that the men on the hills were without hope of keeping their summits inviolate. The noise of the firing was like the voice of an irate woman. It was angry enough, but it was not quite certain of itself.

All along the line of the hills, shrapnel was splashing and gouting in its pretty billowing manner. The sky was strung with the soft woolly puff-balls of exploding shells. Against the cobalt of the heavens these puff-balls looked theatrical and vivid.

On the immense bosom of the sea a string of warships lay anchored. The guns from these ships jumped off in spasmodic but appalling crashes. Battery loosed after battery with the precise and deadly mechanism of excellent clockwork, sowing the green hills with the spattering seed of death.

In many ways these guns were monstrously detached and dehumanized. They were coldly

merciless. They were like dried scientists of imperturbable emotions, poking about through piles of useless matter for a truth. They were searching out the feeble few live men on the cliff-top, with avid but unexcited fingers. With uncanny intelligence they rained canistered destruction in inspired accuracy upon the just spots.

Now and then these guns stopped in a deafening silence, moved slowly to a more acute angle and opened again. They loosed off their violent explosions in concentrated attack upon positions where the stubborn prolonged active resistance. Their object in life was to cover the rush of the little active men running forward, always forward on the plain.

From the ships many overcrowded boats were putting off. These came lumping over the short-pitched waves to the beach, and, in a flash, were emptied. They were back again and crowded anew in a startlingly short interval. They were like shuttles unceasing on the loom of the waters.

A moderate gunner might have smashed these boats to splinters with a few well-placed shots. On the hills, however, there were no moderate gunners. Or guns. The nearest artillery depot was twenty miles away, at that

place which the experts had calculated would be the first place attacked. A frantic telegraph clerk was calling up this depot now, over wires that had been neatly but expertly cut an hour ago. On the crown of the high road, a mile or so nearer armed help, a cyclist kicked amid the ruins of his machine as he coughed his life out. Half a squadron of mounted infantry squatted above him in a spinney, watching both his queer movements and the feather of the road, with quick eyes. One of them had just now snapped a new cartridge into his rifle breech.

At the beach, as soon as the infantry touched ground, they fell into rank, with the artificial decision and certainty of clockwork. They seemed to spring from boat-thwarts into ranks by the aid of well-oiled magic. As the men shot into their appointed places one listened for the click.

As the men paraded, officers looked them over, performing the action very quickly, very efficiently. Their calmness was phenomenal. In a moment all of them went at the hills at a run.

Many of the boats that came from the ships were lashed together in twos. Between each pair was hung a field-gun, a limber or a caisson.

These boats were towed in strings by breathless, snuffling petrol-launches. At the end of each string lolloped a barge gorged with blasé, dejected horses, the teams.

No cavalry was landed yet.

The artillery was landed with incredible rapidity. This is the artillery's habit.

As the boats grated keel, swarming men metamorphosed on the bank. They clutted like hanging flies about the boats. They struggled and sifted and swirled in writhes. They divided. In a flash the gun-teams broke jingling and clinking to the plain.

They went forward for two hundred yards, bearing to the right where there was a suitable emplacement. The horses pricked and danced in the pretty strutting manner of gun-teams : the gunners jig-jogged to the unevenness of the plain ; the guns wagged idiotic noses to the grass. Over the firing the clink-a-clink of bits and traces, the soft, woody rumble of the wheels dominated.

Upon a tiny hog-back the guns went about. The eager, feverish gunners became busy about them. They clustered. They sprang back. Then "cra-ack"—the little natty guns had joined their voices to the chorus of the grand opera of death.

From the gallery of an iron lighthouse by the sea-wall, a stolid man stood out against the sky. He began wagging two flags. These flags flickered and snapped with jerky impressive vehemence. The men running for the hills stopped.

They drew together and hid themselves in such folds and dips of the plain as would adequately cover naught but soldiers. Abruptly the plain became empty and lifeless. Only the field-guns stood out upon it and were active.

The field-guns moved up, covering a great distance at a run, the gunners working the wheels and lifting and pushing the trails. They began firing again. The whole business of battling was to be left to their superior methods.

The group of quiet, regardful men standing near the signaller had decreed this. One of them, the quietest, was the general officer in command, and the others were members of his staff. None of these men looked really like the soldiers of the illustrated weekly, or of the preter-gaudy Christmas supplement. They looked highly capable specialists intensely absorbed in a highly novel experiment.

By telephone, the general had learnt the exact strength and disposition of the defenders on the cliffs. He had also learnt that they

were palpably unprepared and that they lacked artillery. There was an officer with a telephone receiver at his ear who told him all this in short, biting, colloquial sentences. At the other end of the wire was seated another officer with an infinite capacity for observing these vital truths. He was six hundred feet above the general's head. The telephone wire ended in the car of a captive balloon. The officer in the balloon had explained the sheer unprofit of wasting men against the hills when the guns could do the work.

The guns of three full field-batteries combined with the artillery of the warships to vomit shattering death at the mild and easy cliffs. The shout of the discharges was ear-splitting. Under the terrific impact of shelling, the whole face of the cliffs crumbled away in sheets of dust, and was changed.

A villa shivered suddenly, gushed smoke from window and door, and collapsed. The walls sank inward like thin paper; the roof appeared suddenly to have been torn to pieces by a titan hand. As the debris struck the ground a twisting fume of grit and dust whirled up. After a moment a small flame danced over the ruin; it looked weak, anæmic in the bright sunlight. The smoke of the burning lifted up

and sagged wearily away to the north-east. It was a thick, dull smoke, and it curled greasily. The villa had been struck by a twelve-inch high-explosive shell.

Where these high-explosive shells hit the cliffs, the earth spurted high and broke away in gritty avalanches. Great trees were thrust back by the blast of them and fell groaning. The huge missiles tore and lashed and scarred the face of the defence in a venomous and malignant manner. Under their deadly salvo, the feeble firing of the defence spluttered, coughed and went out.

Twenty minutes of exquisitely trained battery firing was able to account for all the defence that this surprise attack had found to resist it. The batteries ceased firing.

The regiments which had squatted waiting, easy in the cover of the foreshore, rose to their feet in a wave. At a snapping run they rushed the easy slopes and swarmed over the hill-crests. The position was taken.

Half a squadron of light cavalry, landed by this, swept round through a gap. Their movement had the thrilling and breathless curve of a sickle. They advanced at a bunching gallop. They were circling to smash the retreat of any stragglers the shelling had not

killed. Presently they found their occupation. There was a thin, nervous rattle of shouting. A voice yelling on a high note went up in the air.

At the scream, Rafael Brun, who had watched all in a stupor, through his field-glasses, pulled himself together. He glanced about him. His mild, innocuous, clean-shaven face was livid ; his plump lips were quivering. There were two men standing near him, watching. To one, a tall, grey, leathery fellow, Rafael Brun suddenly felt the necessity of unburdening his soul.

“ My God ! ” he shouted. “ This is terrible . . . it’s ugly . . . beastly.”

The tall man turned on him with a bitter smile.

“ Did you think it was a game ? ” he asked.

On the sea between the shore and the ships increasing numbers of laden boats were moving. They looked like a swarm of beetles making eagerly for a rich dead body. The waters were black with these avid legions of the invading army.

CHAPTER II

THE PRISONERS

RAPHAEL BRUN was chained to that commanding spot of the valley hills. It did not occur to him that he should have raced off his news to the nearest garrison. It did not occur to him that his position might be dangerous, or that presently, as the invaders advanced, he would have to fly. It was not merely that he was a man who had all his life left initiative to other people, it was that he could not tear himself away. He sat his motorcycle, staring at the village through his glasses. He was utterly possessed by the scene before his eyes.

There were seventeen men waiting in a group under the barn wall. They were a grim and significant cluster and arrested the attention immediately. In the constant stream of passing men there were many who had interested and curious glances to throw at them: they were unique and ununderstandable creatures.

Wayfarers glared at them as though they wished to analyse the secrets of their souls. They turned their eyes back over their shoulders always as they walked to fling last looks at them. Even without the scattered guard of armed soldiers the men in this group were palpably prisoners of war.

This wide space on the hill-top was lively and quick with the movement of men, yet these stood motionless and remote. There were officers coming and going and orderlies galloping out and in. At one corner a constant file of men came, reported and went again. There were men who streaked suddenly across the free space, presented a paper, saluted and streaked back again.

There were telephone and telegraph wires everywhere. They hung from the few trees in serpentine coils : they ran to the roofs of houses in fat clusters. They dragged over the earth and cut the air everywhere. To the uninitiated the confusion of coiling wires seemed inextricable. Sweating engineers were feverishly adding to it ; putting up fresh coils, torturing old lines into fresh puzzles of demented convolution. These engineers had a driven and headlong method of activity ; they seemed over-hurried but they did their work in a sharp,

clean manner. Because of their energies, officers sitting at tables were able to listen to the talk of the advance guard many miles away. They wrote this talk in a running hand on the pads before them. Almost before they were through, orderlies snatched at the message and were off to the fountain-head with it. In one part of the field, under a queer-flung antennæ of delicate wires, a machine spat and spluttered livid blue flame as the wireless messages snapped from the ships.

There were men, in trite places, lacing flame threads of helio band across the sky ; and other men who stood stolidly and flickered flags with the solemnity of amateur marionettes in a wooden play. Over the hill regiments and squadrons of men took life at the whims of these solemn men.

To the south-west, where the hill sank sleekly into trees, infantry was massing and then moving off again to the road ; the beat of the many legs was curiously suggestive of a metronome as the columns swung away. A regiment of cavalry stood in a field, waiting. The men were on the ground, lolling or strolling about ; the horses were stamping and lifting their heads in jerks. Presently a flag wagged to them : in a jump the restless horses and

lounging men were statues in columns of four. In half an hour the vedettes were all along the roads and in all the fields, a spray of delicate fingers feeling the way.

There were six field-batteries of artillery parked in a meadow to the east. It was only through the trees that one saw the long, snaky line of the teams and the industrious gunners busily removing blemishes, imperceptible to the naked civilian eye, from the venomous pieces. The horse guns were "up" with the advance guard. Under a hunch in the ground behind lay the field-clearing hospital: it was throbbing with the intense activity of life-and-death struggle, but this Brun could not see: or it. It was only when he heard the screams over the shoulder of the hunch that he knew it was there.

On the sandy beach, commissariat, ordnance and medical corps wagons were rising swiftly to form from piled debris. When they were complete, loads grew into them as if piled by fabulous, invisible hands. There were great mounds of munitions upon the sand, and along the pontoon jetty the engineers had built, an endless procession of laden men came streaming with more supplies. The sea was still a mass of quickly moving boats, and the beach was still busy with the marshalling of men and guns

and horses. There seemed to be an endless supply. Occasionally frantic men dashed from the packed masses on the beach to join the constant fretting come and go of orderlies about the Commander-in-Chief.

The Commander-in-Chief, at a table in the midst of his staff, received all communications with great calmness. He was a big, quiet man, with a dry-looking face and thin lips. One got the impression from him that he would find it impossible to close his eyes except in sleep. He had the bright, unwinking eyes of a bird. He read the messages that came to him from the hands of orderlies in swift, biting glances. He appeared to master the contents of the papers in the snapping photographic manner. He sat thinking for a clear moment after reading. He dictated an answer in decisive and unhesitating sentences to the shorthand writer at his side. He never amended a message. He had the valuable habit of precise thought and brevity of expression.

He sat for a long time at his table working like this. He plunged undeviatingly through immeasurable waters of intricate detail. At times he leaped up quickly and lounged over a large scale map pinned on to an adjacent table. At times he was elbow-deep in masses

of papers that rustled and cracked as his arms crushed them. Occasionally he went to the edge of the clearing and studied with his glasses the rolling face of the land : he clicked a constant stream of orders from his lips without taking his eyes from the lenses. The officers about him jumped and jerked like creatures of wire to the galvanic fervour of his voice.

Brun, through his glasses, watched him with a passion of concentration. The generals of his imagination, the generals he had read about in print, had not been as this creature. They had been gorgeous and decorative things. They had worn glittering uniforms. They had adopted striking and picturesque habits of gesture and modes of life.

This man did not conform to the accepted tradition. His clothes were dingy, his gestures were commonplace and trite. He was without the shining harness of war. He conveyed no more stimulating impression than that of an exceedingly capable accountant getting through an overplus of work with despatch and skill.

In his way he was a revelation of what war was. It was not a glorious, glittering, romantic pageant. It was not a thing of passionate splendour and splendid passion. It was a trade. Its details and intricacies had to be

mastered in the dogged and sordid way of any other trade. Telephone and telegraph messages, written orders, shorthand notes, piles of papers were more prominent than the sword. He who could grapple with these details best was the winner. The victory was to the best tradesman.

In the midst of the bustle of business, there came a cessation. The spread about the general's table seemed to clear. An officer left the general's side. He went over to the group of dejected men by the barn wall. Soon these men moved over, under guard, to the general.

Brun's lenses shook as he watched the scene. He saw his own countrymen facing the victorious enemy. He wondered what would happen. He was displeased with the furtive and hang-dog look of his countrymen. He would rather they held themselves like heroes, not so much like scolded dogs.

The general was speaking to these men. He was endeavouring to extract information from them, but Brun did not know that.

Abruptly a startling thing happened. One of the crowd of prisoners jumped forward. In his hand he, in some unaccountable way, held a revolver. There was an immediate commotion. In the midst of it the revolver went

off twice. Brun saw it flash twice, and an officer behind the general bend abruptly, hand clapped to stomach.

The prisoners began to fight fiercely. They knocked one of the guards down and snatched at his rifle. The other guards drove their bayonets into the mob of prisoners. There was a scuffle. Armed men came springing from all sides. They seemed to pour in on the prisoners. Brun remembered having seen a colony of ants pour out of a nest to attack a spider. This reminded him of those ants. There was soon a wrestling bout of men where the prisoners had stood. In a minute it was all over.

The prisoners were standing up before the table again, save for one man, who lay stretched with a hideous stillness on the ground. There were many guards now. The general had not been hurt; he was standing, too. His hand stretched threateningly towards the guarded men. Like the jerk of a film picture all the men, guards and prisoners, began to move off. They were stepping quickly, making for the barn wall they had left. A section of infantrymen moved out from under trees and drew up in a double line parallel to the barn wall. The prisoners were placed with their backs to the barn.

The tall, grey man by Brun's side cursed deeply and softly.

"That fool and his revolver have thrown away seventeen lives," he snarled.

Brun swung upon him.

"Hey?"

"A firing party and a wall," commented the tall man.

Brun became excited.

"D'y' mean? D'y' mean they're going to kill those men? D'y' mean——? They can't. They mayn't."

The tall man was amused.

"Who's going to stop 'em?" he wanted to know. "You or me?"

"But they can't," protested Brun. "It's all wrong. It's savagery. It's not right."

"Huh," grunted the tall man. "When your trade's killing—killing men—it's the man who is got the grip hand who does the ordering."

"But it ought to be stopped—it *must* be stopped."

"Who's going to stop it," said the big man, "once it's begun?"

A thin sharp rip of firing shattered in the air. When the firing party moved away the prisoners were no longer standing against the barn wall.

CHAPTER III

THREE COLUMNS

THE sound had been as of a dozen metal canisters rattling and banging in a draught of hell ; but it was only a mudguard loose. Brun shut off mixture, and, slowing down, he swung from the motor-cycle to put the fault right. As he stood straight, he concluded that his nerves were on edge. He had pressed cheek and head with his hand and found them dewed with a gritty sweat. Yet he had merely been sitting inactive upon his racing machine in a breeze begot of thirty miles an hour. He held his fingers up before his eyes. They kicked and jerked like palsied things.

He endeavoured to persuade himself that what he had seen by the sea was not a peculiarly evil dream. He told himself it was actual and very ugly reality. But it was difficult to bully his mind into a state which acknowledged the acts of this morning as more substantial facts than dreams. His thoughts about the

business were not nebulous or dreamlike ; he knew and understood all that had happened : and he felt that there was horror in it all. Only his mind refused to be either horror-struck or acutely interested.

There were three smudges of indolent cloud-bank lifting up out of the airless plain. Brun noted them as he looked back and down. They rose up sluggishly and blew, drifting back to the sea through the throat of the hills. When the wind caught these clouds they tore and whisped in erratic gusts. The sun touched them, and they turned from pearl to opal and from opal to pearl again.

Tongues of them crawled over the young green growing things that floored the plain, licking up their freshness greedily. Brun, who had an imagination, thought at once of the hideous, all-absorbing suckers of octopi.

The bowels of these clouds shifted and throbbed with a ceaseless stirring. It was like the flutter of a pulse close under the skin. There was live movement there, but it could not be defined. Here the cloud mass was thicker. It was a heavy, oily dun colour, as though it strove, by density, to secrete all that moved in it. Now and then there tongued out from it vivid spits of electric sparkle, shining like flame.

There was a singular and notable tendency common to all three clouds. They smoked forward along well-defined lines of progress. The filming of opalescent bank hung curtain-like. They were curtains of precise alignment. Brun saw at once they followed the main roads.

Listening, there was to be heard a drowsy and insectile murmuring coming to him against the wind. It was the voice of the traffic of men and of horses, of guns and of wagons.

The three clouds were of the dust that kicked from the advancing feet of three great invading army corps. The electric points of light came when the sun kissed the surfaces of arms.

Three army corps were marching by three great roads to three great centres. That one to the south was bent upon aiming a smashing blow at the southern industrial cities and tracts. The one to the west was to do the same in that direction, also it was to cover the northern column from western and southern attack. The northern column was for the capital.

The three roads that took the columns were choked with swinging regiments and an endless mass of equipment wagons. Commissariat, ordnance, medical and engineers' vehicles rattled and locked and jerked and went on

again upon these roads. Their extent was interminable, their progress snail-like. They were driven by the sons of Job. When any of their luckier fellows—cavalry, infantry, guns—swung by them, these drivers were made the butts of many classical shafts of wit. They, however, smiled imperturbably from their heights and gently flicked their horses with apathetic whips. Now and then the line jammed, apparently for ever, while feverish officers spurred passionately about, putting things right. At these times the wagon drivers would loll back on their perches and allow their eyes to range this strange, new land of enigma, which, legally, they must hate. Their expressions were bemused and just a little eager. They expected to see some fabulous monster behind every spinney.

Beside the vehicles marched little gouts of sullen and stolid infantry, who swore with genius at the slightest hitch. When they were halted to let infantry regiments go by, these men looked in another direction. It gave them the furtive aspect of detected criminals. They were, however, merely anxious that the swinging companies should not see the sick envy that flared in their faces.

Cavalry came clattering along the roads at

intervals, demanding way with all the bombast and assurance of the useless. Now and then came the rush of the bumping guns, demanding nothing, being given all. There was an eternal streaming of orderlies to and fro, spurring hectically as on errands of life and death. Occasionally little sober groups of men rode along. They noted important facts in their journeying with the quick eyes of staff officers. And once or twice a giant-hearted motor-car, that took road and grass plot and bank with equal disdain, lunged by backward or forward. In it was a large, dry, level-eyed man who sat stiffly and saw all things.

Before each of the columns stalked a string of engineers' wagons, each bearing an ever-revolving drum, worked cunningly by a ratchet on the wheel hubs, that spun a fine line of wire. In the hedges were reared the slender posts of the field telegraph—the wire from the drums ran across the top of each.

Between the three roads the country was creeping with men. Over the plough lands and the fallow, through the standing crops they pushed, going secretly. Little patches of wood were full of them. They were active in hedgerows. Cavalry and mounted infantry were everywhere.

A great, delicate webbing of patrols and scouts were pushed, swarming like sensitized antennæ before and upon the flanks of the armies. The land was full of these. They moved forward as the armies moved forward. They were spread out in keen-eyed and wide-flung parties. They were lacing the fields and the woods and the side roads with squads of keen-eyed men. They were the filaments of the giant-enmeshing web of invasion. Nothing escaped their vigilance, and the columns marched safely because of them. They swept the country bare of menace. It was like the flowing ripples that come from a stone flung into a pond. This great half-circle of menace flowed and rippled ever onward. The analogy of the stone and pond held further. From the point where the stone had plunged, fresh ripples continued to emanate. Ripples of armed men, for the beach was still feverish with its traffic of invasion.

Rafael Brun was leaning across the saddle of his motor-bicycle looking at the advancing troops and considering how these ripples might be checked. They marched so placidly and so unrestrainedly that great anger glowed within him. He was exasperated at the trespass of this great army into his land. He reckoned

they should be stopped. He had all the righteous indignation of an excellent game-keeper viewing the sneaking raid of a poacher.

As he hung over his cycle saddle he felt very angry. He wondered why the ripples of armed men had not been checked. Surely there should have been defending troops up to stop them by this? Surely the defending forces were not going to allow these people to march placidly on into the heart of the country, doing incalculable damage by sheer weight and impetus of their progress?

He railed against his own country's troops. Like all men who had not troubled to think about war at all, he somehow considered that armed men, defenders, should have the mobility of thought. By an intuitive instinct, he felt, an army should spring up out of the very earth and bar the way of these monstrous invaders. They should check the advance by a fierce and immediate battle. Unknown by him were all the vital details connected with the mobilizing of adequate defence forces, of consolidating a workable line of defence, of manœuvring for tenable and unshakable positions. All he saw was a loss of time that meant damage and disaster and destruction.

Every minute lost, every foot advanced by

the invader accentuated this damage, disaster and destruction. The invaders went over the country like locusts. Standing crops were smashed down before the sluggish decision of their advance. Root fields were hacked and damaged irrevocably. The land was trampled in a pitiless and hopeless manner out of all fruitfulness by the myriad churning feet of the advance. Every moment made the ever-extending circle of that advance more disastrous and destructive.

In a sudden blazing vision Rafael Brun perceived that all this destruction was inevitable. Up to now this side of war had not occurred to him. Perhaps, in a vague way, he had felt that there might be some godlike means of progress through an enemy's country, some immense and wondrous system of rules for war that left the country-side untouched. In his gently imagined pictures of war, he had never seen the country through which armies advanced. He had seen only the splendour of advancing armies. Somehow these splendid armies had religiously kept to the roads and managed to leave the hedgerows bright and clean, without even a film of dust.

Now he perceived the advance of armies as something actuated by an enormous and

relentless force. This force had eyes for great results only. It strode forward unswervingly to attain those great results. Whatever minor obstacles came in the path they had to go under foot. These advancing armies under Rafael Brun's gaze were aiming at the huge result of complete and final victory. They ruthlessly employed every device to attain that victory. If victory was to be assured even by the wasting of a few fields, the devastating of crops, they wasted and devastated. The lesser problems had to give way before the greater. Rafael Brun saw it all vividly. The victory of an entire people was more important than the disaster and helpless ruin of a few. All the same Rafael Brun shivered when he thought of the hopeless despair of the farmers. He wondered, too, if the farmers had had any more definite or practical ideas about war, or of safeguarding themselves against war, than had been his previous to this day.

Abruptly as he thought, Rafael Brun became aware of his own position in the field of advance. He looked about him. The soldiers of the nearest column had come very close. He could see the flash of their clothes at intervals through the green of the trees. They were creeping forward in secret breaks and rushes. At one

time he saw a group of five mounted men dash across a stretch of turnip field and dissolve into a rake of scanty trees. They hid themselves so well and they came and passed so quickly that the tiny episode had the suggestion of illusion about it.

He turned about suddenly, and obtained a horrible, jumping surprise; the sensation experienced by a person who, fancying he is alone, turns abruptly to find many people looking at him. Below him in a hedge he saw a line of posed, khaki-clad men kneeling and looking quietly up in his direction. The sudden fright of it hypnotized him to immobility.

They were very silent and their regard was level and unwavering. He might have been some rare specimen newly discovered by anxious anthropologists. They knelt there, their rifles across thighs, looking up at him through a vacuum from which all sound and colour and atmosphere had been abruptly sucked. He felt like the victim of a snake. He could not stir. In a moment he began to wonder why they did not shoot him. He began to curse the inefficiency of his own troops. They should have been here to protect him.

Then he saw with a sickness of relief that the

men were not looking at him. Their attention was concentrated upon a tiny drama going forward a little down the hill. Below him was an old hedge-worker—one of very few inhabitants in this lonely country-side. He was standing loosely, looking with curious astonishment at an officer and a private climbing the steep hill towards him.

The old man's attitude was one of pleased astonishment at this pageant that had been got up especially to delight his military appetite. When the officer came near, his palpable foreignness tinged the old fellow's attitude with mystified suspicion. He inflated his nature with the sublime condescension that all his countrymen bestowed upon alien cattle. He inclined his head as a man listening with politeness and patience to a fool.

When the officer spoke, the old fellow's body sprang rigid. The startled anger that his face showed outwardly held him so tightly that he was incapable of vocal or physical action. When the officer spoke again, he flamed alive. He howled an oath and flashed a blow at the man with his great hedging knife. The private with the officer struck him in the throat with a quick-flung bayonet thrust.

Rafael Brun was at once ablaze with horrified

anger. He screamed a threat down to the assassin. He leaned across his machine and shook his fist. He would have fought the whole contingent.

A rifle smashed off from the men in the hedge below, and a scream leaped and was gone by his head. He saw a man beneath him doing something with the breech of a rifle. Others had their guns levelled in his direction. He realized that they were shooting at him.

As he thundered down the farther slope away from them, he heard the smash—smash—smash of a series of discharges.

He heard also, farther to the right, a sudden leaping pulse of firing. A give-and-take of crashing discharges, with an undernote of throbbing rattle which he rather fancied was a maxim. There was an engagement there, then. The troops were up at last. A wild note of pleasure ran through his body. He advanced the spark of his machine and sped, racing along the biscuit-coloured road.

CHAPTER IV

THE VILLAGE THAT STOOD IN THE PATH

THE village lay in a hollow, and was heavy and sleepy with the saturation of sun.

The biscuit-coloured road writhed itself cleverly between the houses. It evaded them so completely that it led one to wonder if the houses had been put there first, or, coming after, they had merely taken the best positions they found left.

The houses were venerable and grey-aged in any case. Cycles of years had gone by and had found nothing to disturb them. There were about thirty of them, and most were cottages. They were beamed and rough-cast and had goggling, badly hung, leaded windows. Three were curious-looking shops, notorious for smells. Five were public-houses. An old straight-backed, dignified church stood in the centre of the village. The houses clutted eagerly round it like the young at the dugs of a mother.

The road was shared by seven or eight sprawling babies, with a dog and a few agnostic chickens. There was a thick, felted dust upon it that the babies found delectable. The chickens probed this dust, obviously without hope, for prodigal worms. The dog frankly used it to scare fleas. In the level wash of the sun the whole place had a scenic appearance. It was lifeless and flat like a village street upon a stage. There was the same hard colouring, in primary tints, of canvas under the lime-light. The trees that poked up between the houses and raked over the broken splint fences had an identical air. In the blank, clean atmosphere each leaf appeared to have been lined in by a conscientious artist.

Slattern women coming with abrupt descents to the centre of the road, to look narrowly along it to the east, or to cuff a baby, added a further theatrical touch. They were of a low comedy type. They were big-hipped, blowsy women, with rich bosoms that badly fastened bodices threatened momentarily to expose. Their skirts were tucked high up and they showed eccentric petticoats of emphatic dye, and thick, strong ankles. Their fully exposed arms, as large and as muscular as a man's, were usually gloved in soapsuds or dough.

THE VILLAGE IN THE PATH 33

When not out on the road these women called out, in knife-edged voices, amazing commands and blood-curdling threats to the sprawling babies, who paid not the slightest attention. Cloaked and muffled scuffings came to the babies through the windows. Being babies wise in their generation, they understood that the traffic of household business was in hand and that they would not be disturbed. They sat, therefore, on their hams, and projected fabulous puddings, drew pictures, or threw grit at the chickens, with the imperturbable serenity of babyhood. Apart from these sounds and movements the village might have been dozing.

When the cyclist came into the village he left a smoking trail of dust behind him and a baby with blighted ambition in dust puddings. He was going very rapidly. The rush of his pedal chain whirred in the sun-sodden air with a palpable sound. A mudguard kicked and rattled with a loud, clanging din. He snaked in and out among the babies in a marvellous manner. The chickens rushed squawking from his path and a baby yelled in mortal terror.

The blowsy women put their tousled heads from doors and windows as though all were actuated by the one lever. Some of them called out in menace, and one shouted :

"Darn you, you ugly swine."

But another said: "It's John." She called, shrieking: "John—John—John. Here, John—coom back. John, coom back. Here!"

The other women said: "Dang the man. What's th' matter wi' th' feller." They came out of their doors and looked after him.

A younger woman, who was sick, came to an upper window and looked out, holding her nightshift about her with a loose hand. She asked continuously what was the trouble. Nobody told her. With the rest she cast quick glances from time to time to the east. There was something to the east that made them anxious. The cyclist had come from the east. Somehow they felt very lonely for the absence of their men in the fields.

The man cycled on a score of yards. He slowed shakily and came round and back, wobbling. He brought up within a few feet of the women and got off.

His knees kicked a little under him from his overstrained thighs. He and his bicycle swayed dangerously. He appeared to have trouble in bracing his muscles; there was an untautened aspect about the fellow. His dry mouth drooped open vacuously.

A baby crawled to him, snuffing, and em-

THE VILLAGE IN THE PATH 35

braced a trouser. He paid it no attention. He waggled a hand helplessly ; he licked his lips in an effort to speak. The women looked at him ; one of them giggled. The man found his voice. He leaned across the saddle and screamed.

"Git from 'ere," he shouted. "Git from here. Git away. Git from here." He waved an impotent hand. "F'r Christ's sake git from here." He stood mowing at them.

The women drew together in an instinctive protective movement. They looked at him in dumb query. One asked :

"What's make yer scat, yer loonie ? What's fuddled yer ? "

The man loosed both hands from his machine so that it fell with a smash. He screamed. His hands sawed the air.

"Git," he mouthed, "the bloody beasts are coming. . . ." He stood rigid and screamed insane oaths.

A woman pushed through the group and caught his arm roughly.

"'Ere," she cried, "'nough said. What's the matter with yer, yer fool ? Are yer mad . . . what's the matter wi' yer . . . ? "

The man shook her off roughly.

"I tell yer," he said. "Ain't I telling yer ?

They're coming. Them dirty scum. . . .
Soldiers."

He looked at their blank faces.

"I tell yer," he shouted, "soldiers. Foreign soldiers. Invaders. That firing you heard this mornin'—that was them. They're 'ere firing and shooting. Killing. I tell yer . . ."

The women looked at him and at each other with dull uncomprehension.

"It's the manoeovers," one said.

"Dam yer," the man spat viciously. "Don't ye 'ear what I said. It's *foreigners*, I tell yer. Foreigners. They're killing people. I saw 'em kill people. They killed Hoppy Smidt. I saw 'em. He stood up to 'em with a hedge knife, but they got 'im with a bayonet, and 'e went down, and 'e kicked . . ."

A motor-cycle came whirling into the village. The dust bellied up behind it in soft puff-clouds. At sight of the group the rider, a plump, easy-visaged man, sprang off. He came running forward, pulling at his machine.

"Here," he called, in a voice of command. "Get into your houses quickly. Get under cover. Get inside. Bolt your doors too . . ."

A woman in the crowd said: "It's that motor feller what stayed at the inn last night." And another cried: "Is it true, sir? Is it true?"

THE VILLAGE IN THE PATH 37

Brun waved his hands peremptorily. It had suddenly come to him that he was a very important person. It was he alone who could save these people. He was the one level-headed person amongst many inclined to panic. He foresaw that people in the villages would be inclined to panic : to fly before the invader in a way that would beget a horrible state of destitution and misery. Whereas by staying quiet the enemy would pass them by without doing damage. He perceived a noble apostleship for himself. He strove to act up to it.

"Get into your houses," he shouted. And "Yes, it's true. But it'll be all right. If you get into your houses it'll be all right. You won't be hurt. Non-combatants won't be hurt."

An old creature started wailing.

"Oh, my Gawd," she shrilled. "We'll all be kilt. Oh, my Gawd."

The young woman at the upper window cried out :

"And I'm an ailing creature and I can't get away. They'll murder me in my bed." She let go her shift, regardless of the exposure of her breast. She put her arms about her head and began to scream.

Rafael Brun turned and shouted at her.

"Don't talk nonsense. You'll be quite all right. They won't touch you. You'll be as safe as if nothing had happened. You've only got to keep to your house and remain quiet."

The man John picked up his bicycle.

"My advice is, git," he shouted at the top of his voice. "That's my advice. Git—just that."

He jumped on his machine and whirled away along the road. Brun turned and endeavoured to reassure the women.

"Pay no attention," he cried. "It's quite all right——"

In the middle of his sentence a frenzy of rifle fire ripped the air below the village to the east. The women screamed and cowed together. At once a detachment of hussars shot racing into the village. They held their carbines loose across their bodies. Their heads were turned back, watching over their shoulders. They had a frantic, headlong air. They were pursued apparently by devils.

The babies in the dust rose in their fright and fled as one. One was not very lucky. A troop horse's knees struck it in the back. It went rolling and rolling over into the gutter. Fortunately, its back was broken at once, so it felt little, and screamed not at all.

THE VILLAGE IN THE PATH 39

A voice snapped out: "This'll do," and a young officer flung up a hand. In a flash the troopers were off their horses and flying to walls and fences for cover. In the giant cloud of dust their rushing coming had raised, they looked like so many khaki demons in a misty, khaki hell. Their spurs glinted quickly, and their bent attitudes when running gave them a sinister, feline appearance. The young officer, who was a lieutenant, ran behind them and told them where to hide themselves in a brisk, commercial manner. He was as cool and as definite as a well-trained storekeeper. He yelled tremendous oaths very fluently, but mechanically.

Rafael Brun sprang to this young man as soon as the detachment unhorsed. He raised his voice in vigorous protest.

"Look here," he yelled. "Look here, you mustn't come here. . . . Go outside . . . somewhere. You mustn't come into a village."

The lieutenant had answered him without looking round.

"Get out of my dam way," he said.

Rafael Brun persisted. The youngster swung on him savagely. He gritted out: "You go to hell. I've got my men to look after, see. I'm not going to lose any of my

men for your funny little fancies, comprenez ? —you go to blazes.”

He turned and gave himself to his business. Brun ran back to the screaming women. He hustled them into their houses.

The troopers were loosing off into the trees that rose, screening the east. They began work the moment they took cover.

They jerked off shots with amazing rapidity. Their movements were those of a reliable pump. They fired, and in the flash their rifle butt was down, the bolt snicked, the empty shell flew out, up came their elbows again, and the rifle spat and dribbled fire. Their elbows jerked up and down with an automatic celerity that was fascinating. Now and then they reached down to the pouch at their waists and chose a clip with extreme judgment and care.

Some of these men were on their bellies in the grass. Some were half kneeling, in a permanent genuflexion, behind walls, or fences, farmyard lumber or unyoked carts. Two citadelled themselves behind a mound of dung, but they did not seem to notice it. There were two or three lying on the rake of barn roofs, their toes braced in the thatch. Two were working with excessive seriousness about a

THE VILLAGE IN THE PATH 41

tripod with a looking-glass upon it. The glass took the sun and blazed.

To these two men the lieutenant addressed many remarks. He said: "Made 'em out yet?" and "Don't seem to make 'em get the dam thing, do you?" and "When you do get the swine ask 'Shall I sit tight or fall back?' Might let 'em know that I can't sit tight."

He spat these remarks at the men working the helio when he got near them. Really, he passed his time walking up and down behind the shooting troopers. It did not seem to occur to him that there were men among the trees firing exclusively at him.

The bullets were singing all about his head, but he appeared quite unconcerned. He drawled carefully chosen words of advice to his troopers. He said:

"There's a patch of the beggars working up by those elms—'bout twelve hunnerd range. Jus' push 'em back." And "You recruits, don't bucket so when you pull off. You're pulling devil heavy. Ease up a bit. Shoot slower. You're only killin' turf. I want you to kill men." And "Let's pray the saints the beggars don't bring up a gun."

He had a gun of his own. A group of

troopers had snatched a Maxim and cartridge boxes from the backs of horses at the instant of dismounting. It was angled and sheltered under a corner of wall. The whirring rattle of its discharge screamed over the sound of the rifle firing.

Presently the enemy brought up a quick firer, too. A Nordenfeldt one-pound gun. The stream of vicious, stinging little shells came detonating and smashing in the face of the defence. They were all over the front of the hussars' line like great crackers, and doing vital harm. One landed in the hopper of the Maxim and punched the gunner over in ruin, backwards. He lay in a heap, rolling a little. His mate at once straddled over him and kept the belts racing.

This gunner was not the only man hit. For a time the half troop had gone unscathed, but presently there was an epidemic. Men began dropping backward in a curious wrung-out way. Their attitudes were singular and mainly angular. Sometimes a man got up and walked—anywhere—with excessive solemnity. He would walk for many paces, then the hand of God would catch him mightily and he collapsed, with terrible vehemence, to the ground. Others just crawled and crawled.

THE VILLAGE IN THE PATH 43

The lieutenant was telling himself he could not stand this much longer.

The enemy's fire was becoming terribly hot. The air was alive with a wild screaming. It was the aggravated sound of telegraph wires taut in a gale. Only the sound was shriller. The bullets were rustling through the trees with soft, flickering movements. Where they hit the leaves came circling down in a soft and swimming manner. On the bark strips came out in running tears as if a great cat was at work.

The walls of the village houses began to star. Little spurting breaks of brick and rough-cast started from their surface and fell down. A chimney abruptly shivered, swayed and then dissolved in a myriad pieces. A shell beat a window-frame out with a crash. As the enemy crept nearer and nearer the face of the houses became seared with the smashing explosion of the one-pound shells.

The women had gone into the houses when Brun had forced upon their minds the wisdom of the act. They had lain close and quaking, some on the floor, some under the sturdiest cover, none daring to move. Now under the goad of the shell fire they could not stay quiescent.

The shells were banging and smashing at their very walls and they did not feel safe. The smash of the rifle fire was on top of them, creeping up closer to them. It was too close. They felt they could not stay here to be caught and shot down like animals in their lairs. They *would* not stay.

The rain of the firing sprayed upon the village. It was like a jet from a fire hose. It lashed and tore and beat flat the very garden plants, sweeping them prone in swathes. The dust of the road would suddenly jump to life in a thousand hissing spurts as the bullets went "flick—flick—flick" on its surface. Stout wooden palings flew, without apparent reason, into a gale of glancing splinters : something struck them and they rose hissing in the air. A shell crashed into a door and burst, with a thunderclap, in the hall. A shell plunged through a window detonated in a piano, slaying a baby. The mother sprang out of this house, but at the pavement a shell took her in the throat and flung her corpse like a sack across her own gate-post.

A house in the centre of the village began to trickle smoke and, presently, to give life to small sleek flames. The woman who broke out of this house jumped clear of the ground and

THE VILLAGE IN THE PATH 45

half turned as the bullets struck her. Her face expressed transcendental astonishment. She dropped in a sitting position under a wall ; her thigh was shattered. The bullets pattered into her as a brisk rain would patter on to her.

The women were running from every house now. A panic had commenced. Some held babies to their breasts, others dragged children trailing by the hand. Nearly all had absurd and useless pieces of domestic furniture in their grasp. One woman had a saucepan, one a piece of oilcloth, another an ugly framed oleograph. The woman with the picture seemed oblivious of the fact that a bullet had torn the most notable features of subject from the picture : she hugged it to her as if it were her dearest possession. A bullet struck the saucepan of the first woman with a resounding clang ; she did not drop the thing, but ran on screaming, holding merely the shattered handle in her fierce grip.

Soon the women were inextricably mixed with the hussars, who were now retiring. They were getting terribly in their way. There was a horrible confusion. The shots aimed at the soldiery came "phutting" into them. They got in front of the hussars' rifles and the discharges at such close ranges tore great

wounds. The spraying of the invading shooting scythed them all down. A girl clung in terror to a frantic hussar, who beat at her face in the terror panic had communicated. The same shell killed both.

The men were all busy, dropping to their knees and firing, staving the intrusive enemy off, and the women rushed among them, disturbing them and flinging them over. The lieutenant ran about among his men with an imperturbable insanity. He was yelling: "Steady. St-ea-dy, steady there. Fire low," and "No hurry. Fall back—easy. No hurry." The beat of the fire about and above him was showering down slates and brick; rubble and cement in dusty cascades. Now and then it seemed to steady itself and beat straight. The frenzied rabble of men and women and kicking horses appeared to wither before it.

And then in a flash the street was empty and the noise of firing was wiped clean out.

The eastern end of the village became full of strange, eager men, who ran forward quickly, but scientifically, using every bit of cover. They were through the place very quickly. The firing smashed out again. This time it was well upon the other side of the houses.

THE VILLAGE IN THE PATH 47

The hussars were being shaken from a hill-crest to which they had turned and clung. Picket men came riding with a clatter through the street leading strings of bucketing horses. The loose equipment banged and rattled upon the creatures' flanks. These men and horses were following up the firing line, for the invading force was of mounted infantry. A solid wedge of mounted men followed a minute after.

An officer stopped and swung his horse across to a group of cringing women about Brun. He began to reassure them.

"It's all right," he cried. "Have no fear. You will not be hurt. We don't war upon women and children. If you are peaceful and quiet you have nothing to fear . . ."

But Rafael Brun was looking at the odd and awful bodies on the road. Some of them had been women. The officer followed his gaze and shrugged his shoulders. His expression said plainly that it was sad but it could not be helped. This was war. One could not pick and choose when the bullets were flying.

He pulled his horse about and went trotting after his men.

A squad of marching men : the head of the great pushing worm that was the columned army corps came swinging up the road.

Brun began to wonder why none of the male villagers had come into the place to care for their wives. He looked up at the church clock. It was twenty-three minutes past the hour. He realized with a shock that the whole episode had taken nine minutes.

The fields about the village were full of men moving forward.

CHAPTER V

AFTER

THE day waned to evening, with a golden and mellow perfection. The hush that came after the fighting was deep and serene, silken and almost holy. The air was like velvet to the cheek. The sky had taken on a crystalline and shining pellucidness; it was ecstatic. Little flecks of cloud in it were delicately rose-shaded from petal-pink to the purest primrose. The trees in and about the village stood up against the sky, clearly lined and strangely still, like things carven of some exquisite metal. The sun shone through the leaves, dappling them with gold dust. The outlines of the houses and the church were set in a quick, moist and luminant light. The whole of nature conspired to make the place exquisite. There was a cloistered hush. In the trees the voices of the birds thrilled the stillness with songs like jewels.

Rafael Brun stood in the shambles that had been the village street. He was not aware of

the sunset. He was leaning heavily on the handle-bars and saddle of his motor-cycle, because his legs were trembling too helplessly to bear him. He was sick. Every time he looked about the village he was sick. Yet he could not refrain from looking. Some enormous inner power coerced him.

Just in front of him, across the road, hung the woman who had been flung across her own gate-post. Nobody had thought to move her yet, for she was dead. Her skirt trailed down like a bundle of dirty clothes. Her feet rested on the ground, her ankles had sagged over sideways like the ankles of a marionette.

Behind her, her front door was open. Brun could see that a sideboard had fallen. A table had broken its fall, but every piece of its crockery was piled up in ruin beneath it. There was no other injury to this house.

A dead hussar lay in the road near by. He was on his face and his head seemed to have got under his body in an extraordinary way. As he was in the road, and many men were passing, this corpse was continually being kicked a little more towards the gutter. Brun noticed that his legs trailed in a curious nerveless manner as he was kicked.

Farther along a soldier had propped himself

up against a wall. His face was so bloodless that it looked green. He kept his eyes fixed upon Brun with a dull, large fixity. Brun noticed that he incessantly ran his tongue round his upper lip. Frequently he pulled his loosened tunic away from his chest in a slow and furtive gesture. He looked secretly within. Brun could not account for this singular and ceaseless curiosity. Presently the man pulled the tunic farther out. Brun saw the red and ragged wound in his chest.

Above the man's head the house was badly shattered. The stucco walls were pock-marked with bullets. A great mass of wall had fallen away. The front window had been blown out. Through the gaping sashes Brun could see the utter anarchy of the interior. Half the ceiling was sagging down. Mortar, brick, plaster and furniture had been whirled hither and thither in inextricable confusion.

Most of the houses had suffered in this way. Some of them were so ruined that it looked as if a push would send them crashing. Others were merely full of shot holes, with the surface gone in huge gangrenous patches. In one house the lower half of a door had been dashed away, the top half remaining. Some of the thatches were gashed and ripped from end to

end. The straw stood up like ruffled hair. Near the church two houses burnt steadily and fiercely. Nobody paid attention to them.

The street was littered with debris and the bodies of men and horses. The debris was mainly clothes. Clothes in profusion as though men and women had flung away their entire wardrobes as they ran. Bricks, slates, kitchen utensils, broken chairs, shattered fences made a trail through the village.

The bodies of men were mainly dead. The bodies of horses all dead. Men and horses lay in ungainly and contorted postures. The horses the more natural and graceful. They lay mostly on their sides, their feet together, their necks extended. The attitudes of the dead men were extraordinary. They lost all decency in death.

It was curious how most of the wounded men had crawled to walls and sunk for support against them. There was a friendliness in the walls. One man leaned his face against it, his body twisted, his arms flung out over it. He was like a little boy crying in a corner. Brun could not see his wound. A little pool of blood was welling from under him. The whole progress of his crawl was not only marked by the furrows in the dusty road, but by dull,

ugly patches at intervals here and there. It was singular, by the way, how undemonstrative these wounded men were. There was a little moaning. Nothing more.

Not all the wounded had crawled to the walls. There were unquiet figures on the road and on the open spaces. These figures were invariably prone, invariably restless. They shifted continually from one side to another. They were like men in bed who found it impossible to sleep.

Not all the wounded were men. Many of the stricken women lay about. Brun saw one woman sitting under a bush mopping her lips gently with a piece of rag. Each time the rag came away it was vividly stained. The woman looked at these stains with dazed eyes. She tried again with an unspotted corner of the rag. She seemed a person totally incapable of being convinced. There was something queer about the set of her lower face. With a gulp of nausea Brun saw that the jaw was broken.

There were other women. They were even more terrible to look at than this woman.

Brun for a flaming moment was filled with a gust of ungovernable rage. His whole soul writhed in rage. It was monstrous and diabolical this maiming and slaughtering of women. What had they done to deserve it?

What was the reason of it? How could killing them help? His rage dwindled as abruptly. After all, it could not be helped. It had not been done purposely. They had got in the way, that was all. War could not be stopped because a parcel of women got mixed up in the fighting. It had been an accident. The war was being waged on men. It could not be helped if others suffered, though they were innocent.

Brun presently found himself inside the old church. He had followed the endless procession of stretcher-bearers that came up from the woods below and to the east of the village. He came up because a monstrous wrong was happening. He wanted to complain.

He found the interior of the church a bewildering place. All the pews had been swept up to the altar and piled there. The floor of the church was deep in dirty straw. On the straw lay men. Row upon row of men.

The floor was paved with recumbent men. Their extended feet were only separated by the narrowest passages. They lay there for the most part with a painful, inert quietness. Some of them moaned.

In the passages between the wounded men others were continually passing. Some of

these were stretcher-bearers shuffling along with yet more men to lay on the straw. Others were white-coated and feverish-looking dressers. The hands of these were clutching lumps of cotton wool, their pockets bulged with lint and sublimate bottles. Always too, along the passages, darted surgeons, their white coats hideously bedabbled, their bare arms bloody to the elbow.

Brun watched it all open-mouthed. A soldier came in leaning on the arm of a fellow. There was a bandage round his neck, thick with a dry cake of blood. With a wrench a doctor had this bandage off. His swift, merciless fingers turned and explored the wound. He dabbled a lump of wool into a dish of sublimate. With rapid gestures he scrubbed the raw surfaces of the wound. He reached behind him again. The soldier was a big brutal man, but he winced under the treatment. He moaned when the iodine bit into his lacerated flesh. The doctor had no time for niceties, however. He thrust the man aside. In a moment a dresser was ramming a plug of lint into the open neck.

An artilleryman came in. He stripped the bandage from his right hand and held it up. The fingers on the hand had been crushed to

pulp. Almost without looking at it the doctor snatched a pair of scissors. He held the artilleryman's wrist firmly with his left hand. His right hand carved round the stump like a seamstress cutting a pattern. "Snip—snip—snip." The doctor flicked the ruined flesh aside and sent the artilleryman on to the dressers.

These doctors and dressers laboured with the concentrated bitterness of the overworked. They were, as usual, understaffed. They had to cope with the wounded of a long running fight. This had occupied many hours and a wide stretch of country, and the casualties were frightfully numerous.

They grappled with these cases with lightning-like skill and despatch, but they never got ahead of that incessant stream of maimed men. They plugged, amputated, bandaged, probed, classified the grave and the superficial cases, dismissed the fatal, cleaned wounds, cauterized—all with frantic haste: they were never speedy enough. The line of waiting wounded never stopped. It increased rather than dwindled. It poured up to the church in an unhesitant flood. Brun, who had come up to complain, found his resolution weakening. He felt that he had no right to complain. He stood and looked.

A bunch of medical officers came striding round the side of the church. They rushed at the line of bearers and with imperative gestures directed them towards the presbytery buildings. One of them stood near Brun and shouted orders. He was a person in command.

Rafael Brun thought he might do something with this man. He had a pleasant, tired face. He looked more human than the feverish surgical machines in the building. He looked as though he might care. He precipitated himself into the radius of the man's sphere of action. He interrupted his ordering, braved his anger. The medical officer became conscious of him as a man becomes conscious of an insistent fly. He waved him aside irritably. Suddenly he swung about.

"Hey?" he demanded, in a loud voice.

"Look here," cried Brun. "Your men aren't doing right. They're bringing in *your* fellows only. There are a lot of our fellows down there in the village. They're just as bad, worse, perhaps—but your fellows don't look at 'em. There are women too——"

The medical officer waved him away.

"Oh, don't worry me," he cried. "I've got enough to do looking after our chaps. I'm here to look after our chaps."

"But women," urged Brun shrilly. "Women."

The other damned him. He swung his hand. He indicated the church.

"How the blazes do you think I can trouble about women? What time have I got for women now? Look for yourself, what time have I got for women? What good will looking after women do my men?"

Brun fell back. He was horrified.

"But they're women," he said. "Women."

"I heard you. But I can't do anything—yet. My job's soldiers."

Brun could not believe his ears.

"It's horrible," he cried; "it's horrible."

"It's war," jerked the medical man. "You've got to put up with it."

Brun was wrung with agony.

"My God," he said, "but I never guessed it was like this. Nobody ever told me it was like this."

The medical officer laughed bitterly.

"Ay, they never told you. It wasn't nice. It wasn't good form. The horrors are too revolting to put before comfortable, domestic people. You mustn't be shocked. All the same the horrors *are*. They always are, they always have been, they always will be. And

you never know. It would be bad taste to shock you. Bah—you precious, comfortable, sit-at-home hypocrites make me sick. You never know, you don't try to know, and so you don't care. It's because you didn't care that they've happened. You're the cause of all this—you—*you*. Why didn't you find out all about it and try to prevent it happening to you ? ”

CHAPTER VI

THREE FIELD-LABOURERS AND THE AFFAIR OF THE OUTPOSTS

A RIFLE went off, with a violent snap, behind the hill. At once the valley started horsemen. They rode hard at the hill, flung off and went up it at a run.

Brun had exactly time enough to flash his motor-cycle through a gate, shut off mixture, bump roughly over uneven turf, and end, without vital damage to self or machine, in the clutch of a hedge. The snap of the rifles had drummed up to a brisk frenzy. He looked between branches and found that he could see it all : both sides of the hill.

Thirty seconds ago the land had been empty. It was silent with a texture of silence that was feelable. The little bosoms of these hills that broke the country up, stood light-tipped and level-edged, hard against the grey sky. They were silent. The stunted trees and bushes on their slopes and summits cut into the sky with an ominous definition. They had a startling,

THE AFFAIR OF THE OUTPOSTS 61

gallows-like jetness. They were silent. They had a graveyard loneliness and quiet. The quiet was an evident factor. A giant machine had passed over the land and it had sucked it dry of sound. It was a void and desolate, pulseless place—now it lived men.

The men went up the hill in great jumps. They scrambled upward. They slipped and shuffled and they pulled themselves forward, clutching at the bushes. In the free spaces they held their rifles before them and paid attention to the magazines. Their hands travelled from their cartridge belts to the breech-blocks with a businesslike method. They were actors rehearsing an old piece. They had detached but accustomed movements.

The horses at the bottom of the hill ate grass with great composure. They moved with placidity. At an exaggerated smash of firing they pushed their noses aloft and inquired, sniffing, of the air. After the most contemptuous interval they went back to the vital fact of life, eating fresh grass. At the head of each bunch of them a man stood looking over his shoulder at the crest of the hill. The half-turn of each body towards the crest was expressive of desire. You could see in the face of each one

of these men that he cursed the chaining reins that looped over his arm.

Upon the hill-crest the troopers were lining out as soon as they arrived. They flopped down upon their elbows, and their rifles began to spit death, crisply and venomously, practically at the same instant. The men seemed to have been apprenticed to their business thoroughly. They wasted no time in preliminaries, or in seeking advice. Brun noticed that when they dropped, their carelessness was either not so apparent as it looked, or they had a blind good fortune that was almost God-sent. They always fell where there was a morsel of cover. Theirs was a divine instinct: or a most thorough training. Every man aimed with a quick snapping care before shooting.

There was a little slip in the ground, with bushes, boulders and one or two trees along the edge of it, that made excellent man cover. From this the ground dropped away, but very gently, in a sweep of close-cropped turf. After that there came a wide, flat field, newly turned and ready for seeding, a ditch, another field, a trifle on the rise as distance increased, and then a defined thicket of far-flung hedge. There were men in this hedge shooting tempestuously.

THE AFFAIR OF THE OUTPOSTS 63

It took Brun several minutes to realize that it was at these men that those on the hill-crest were shooting. Several more to note that the hedge actually lined a road. The men in the hedge, he saw, were cyclists. There were machines lying about, with the other things.

A man in the far background was pedalling away at a great pace; his hat passed irregularities in the hedge at quick and flashing intervals. Brun wondered whereabouts the reinforcements that he rode to might be. There were several likely places. Rafael Brun's home was in this district, so he knew them all well.

He also considered if the remaining cyclists could hold on until reinforcements came up. They were far fewer than the constantly augmenting mounted infantry upon the ridge and, also, they fought much worse. Their rifle fire was more vigorous, but it had a ragged and spluttering fervour. The men on the ridge shot with greater leisure, only it was the leisure of calculation. Brun saw that odd, kicking jump that meant death, oftener among the cyclists than among the men upon the ridge.

The three labourers were standing nearly in the middle of the prepared field when the affair

commenced. They were about a machine of overpainted metal, and busy over something. As the rifles ripped into the air they stooped by the machine, their hands upon it, their bodies swivelled from the hips, looking up at the hill and at the hedge. Their dull faces exhibited the sheepish grins of those who, not seeing a joke, do not wish to appear foolish. They stood still, looking up at the fighting men for minutes.

As the rifles flared higher and higher the men winced instinctively, but they did it with good humour. It was obvious that they were under the impression that a fringe of manœuvres had enfolded them. One of them even cheered with a hoarse and unenthusiastic voice.

When the bullets began to ring and sprang upon the metal of the painted machine these men were, at first, less frightened than perplexed and indignant. They glared up at the shooting men with hurt, angry eyes. Then stupefaction at so ill-bred a tactic held them mute. Their mouths were a little open and twisted sideways in astonishment.

Immediately one of them became wounded in the hand. His choler was terrific. He shook the wounded member at the ridge. His face was working with a just fire at so mean a trick.

THE AFFAIR OF THE OUTPOSTS 65

"Gor dang yew!" he roared. "Gor dang yew! Yew fuls. What ye playin' at? Yew dang fuls!"

He strode towards the ridge in irascible swingings. His features were set in avenging indignation. He roared vast menaces at the men upon the ridge. He threatened them with quick and summary justice. It never occurred to him that he was in a way of being killed. The ground sprayed and fluffed into dust about his rough boots, as the bullets whipped it. But he had no thoughts for it. It was as unconnected a proceeding as though it happened to someone else. He had not come to that point in the way of thought that would connect this spraying with fear. He never would come to it. He was merely hugely perturbed at this foolish joke of the men upon the ridge.

At the fifth stride he stood still, abruptly. He lifted his hand up to his chest and touched the red stain that had come there with mystified fingers. When he brought his fingers away they were red also, and they made odd, draggled marks upon his clothing. His face lifted up to the men on the ridge. It was suffused with astonished and aggrieved pain. It was puzzled and hurt. This was a dirty trick. More

sorrow than anger shone out of his eyes. Sorrow for the men upon the ridge. They had done it now, his eyes seemed to say. This dam silly joke had gone a fraction too far, as jokes had the habit of doing. They had overstepped the borders of humour. They had done that which was *gauche*. They'd be sorry for themselves, those men upon the ridge. He turned about to take a step towards the machine, but he stumbled and sank to his knees. After that he slid down quite gently to the earth and lay there quietly.

The other men began to run.

As if actuated by some demoniac impulse to slay these two men, the screams of the rifle fire went up and up. It sounded shrewish. There was a vindictive and petty note in it that made it hysterical. There was no volley firing, only the continuous discharge of independent rifles merging into this volume of spite. The road hedge, but mainly the ridge, lived with a vivid-bitten, orange sparkle. This flared up and up and up.

Even below the ridge, upon this side of the hill, independent units of rifle fire were beginning. The mounted infantry were working forward.

At one point of the ridge the shooting gave

THE AFFAIR OF THE OUTPOSTS 67

an impetuous leap in sound. It hung and then broke out with redoubled vigour. There was a staccato "hammer—hammer—hammer—hammer—hammer" in it. It was like the working of a sewing machine. The leaves and twigs of the hedge began to beat and thresh under a living hail. The ground began to spurt in an extraordinary manner. The air droned with bullets. Upon that point of the ridge a Maxim-Nordenfeldt had come into the action.

The two labourers, not dead, were running. Their heads were bent down and their arms were upraised to guard their faces and shoulders. Their backs described affrighted curves. Over their upheld elbows their terrified faces jerked out nervous glances. Their faces were ashy and very scared. Brun saw their starting eyeballs and felt acutely their formless terror. His gaze riveted upon them with painful attention.

They were running for the gate of the field, he observed. The gate of the field was useless to them, there was no cover there, but some curious instinct bade them fly to it: it was the way out. They saw in it an exit from this menace. Brun had a great desire to call to them and bid them swerve a little to the left.

There was a ditch and a mound there that was also nearer than the gate. He saw this with startling keenness. But he did not call out. He had not the faculty to call out. He could only stay and watch events like some disembodied entity. Desperate moments like these had the habit of quickening and clarifying his brain but paralysing his body. And then the whole business—seemingly of vast spaces of time—lasted only instants.

It seemed, all along, that the poor homely creatures were doomed. They ran as doomed creatures might be expected to run. Their movements were fatalistic and incredibly clumsy. Their stupid flat feet made vile progress. They lifted their knees like uncouth horses. The flurry and the torment of death was in their gait. They were as hunted animals making a dash for an impossible liberty. They could run as bravely as they liked, but presently, in his own time and when their antics had ceased to divert, the hunter would strike them down. At the present moment they were merely the sport of riflemen.

They were struck at practically the same moment, though they died with manifest diversity.

One went up in the air and a little sidelong

THE AFFAIR OF THE OUTPOSTS 69

as though a cudgel had hit him and tossed him upward. He came down in frantic spread-eagle. His arms and his legs were flung apart grotesquely. He hit the earth with an appalling crash. The force that had driven him aloft had smashed him down monstrously. His trunk and limbs and every part of his body struck the earth at once. He stayed where he fell, very quietly, but his feet drummed upon the brown earth.

The other fellow winced rather than leaped, and it was a moment before Brun saw that he was slain. A binding fibre seemed to have been smartly whipped from his body. It slacked. He ran a few paces with sagged and drunken knees. His whole frame bowed and fell inward. Then he fell down and crawled. He crawled with that purposeless direction which Brun now knew to be the attribute of smitten men. There was a flopping, feeble determination about it, but it led nowhither. The fool was blinded with death and his course was in erratic half-circles. Brun recalled that he had once seen a dog, wounded in the buttocks, turn and turn to get a sight of his hurt, in just this manner. He became sick to see how humanity reverted to the animal in moments of such extremity. The sight was degrading. He

was glad when the creature nuzzled, flopping, to the earth, and finally expired. He drew a great breath of relief.

He looked from the corpse and saw that the engagement had expired also. It had drooped and fluttered down, through semitones of shooting, to a feeble spluttering of venom. The men upon the ridge were flowing down from it, over the grass, through the ditch, over the prepared field towards the hedge that had trenched the cyclists. The cyclists that were still alive were upon their bicycles and riding away. There was a last spasmodic crackle of firing and then a quiet. The cyclists had gone out of sight amongst some trees. The silence became suddenly unbearably quiet.

It was over.

CHAPTER VII

WAITING

TWO armed camps lay sleepy and inactive within a mile of each other. Rafael Brun looked down upon them. He wondered what it was that kept the men away from each other's throats.

A slow river flowed between these camps, and, as if by some Olympian law of the War God, a curtain of peace ran as the river ran. Brun wondered if it were possible for either of these armies to pierce the awful sacrosanctity of that dividing curtain. If, indeed, this was the reason of the pause.

The armies seemed to be drawn up after a severely mathematical formula. The precision of each was dismaying. The number of campaign tents in these camps seemed preposterous. They seemed to have been sown in limitless numbers by officers blindly devoted to the theorems of Euclid. Each formed a solid and tremendous mass that looked like a giant puddle. Each army had hit the invisible

and holy curtain of the river and had extended outward instead of forward, just as water does when it is pulled up by a visible wall. The initial puddles had overflowed fields and hills and paddocks and farmsteads. Each puddle was a camp.

The streams still continued to trickle into these puddles. Rills of men and wagons, guns and horses, poured into them with a ceaseless sluggishness. The continuous flux of armaments was sourced from inexhaustible fountain-heads. Infantry and cavalry and artillery drifted interminably along the thin river-beds of communications. There was distinct flow. And the two puddles grew and grew, spreading with the secret distension of fluid over yet more fields, and hills and farmsteads. The puddles enlarged to the dignity of lakes.

Rafael Brun was one of a group of men looking down upon these camps. The attitude of all the men about him was that of fellows of common clay viewing the wonders and the acts of gods. They gazed and marvelled. But there was a tension. The lack of forward movement in either of the two great forces filled them with uneasy qualms. There was something soul-disturbing in the fact that two

great forces had come face to face to fight and yet failed to fight. It was wrong. There they had been facing each other for two days. They were immense monsters desiring only each other's blood. Yet not a drop of blood slaked their awful appetites.

A man by Brun swung upon him with a puzzled face.

"Why're they waiting?" he demanded. "You'd think they'd hate to wait. You'd think they'd do anything but wait. Dash in, y'know, and get through it quickly. A short, sharp smash, and there—done with it."

A thin, high-shouldered man pushed himself within radius of the speaker. He was dirty, he had too much brown hair, his big nose dominated an inadequate chin. No one would have noticed this man at all had he not made himself noticeable. He had a quick, snatching way in life. When he said a thing Brun always felt that this man caught hold of it, planning how it might be improved by an inversion, a deletion or an adjective or two. He was a reporter.

He carried with him always a little book bound in American cloth. His pockets were prodigal of stumpy pencils. With these instruments he wrote sharp-edged fictions which were to be the testament and heaven's own sent

verity to the three hundred thousand readers of a great daily. When he was not sure of his facts he put in a descriptive passage that glittered like tarnished gilt. He called this impressionism. He was an infallible authority on all things on the earth, under it, and over it, for what he did not know he led you to assume he knew. He had a capacity for coming forward whenever and wherever the human voice was raised. He came forward now. He adopted the air of one who listens to the talk of infants.

"A short, sharp smash and there—done with," urged the puzzled man.

"Oh no," put the reporter. "They've got to give their men a breather. And they've got to get a decent force together. They've got to be sure. They've got to win. There's a lot of our people in the camp in front of 'em."

"I was talking of *our* people," snapped the man. "Why can't our people jump on 'em. A short, sharp smash——"

The reporter turned on him a pair of eyes filled with the supreme pity of a god trafficking with dull yokel clay.

"Oh, *our* people," he breathed.

An immense truculence expanded the interrogator. An immense sense of the reporter's supreme ignorance, begot of the fact that the

fellow worked for a paper he did not read, surged in his breast.

"What's the matter with our people?" he demanded.

The reporter consulted the inspired pages of his notebook.

"Only this," he drawled, without condescending to lift his eyes, "our people haven't a short, sharp smash in 'em, unless somebody short, sharp smashes *them*."

"Huh," said the man.

A tiny man who had been seething with information hurled himself into the dialogue. He had determined to speak with crushing deliberation, but excitement made him scream nervously.

"Yees," he shrilled. "That's it. Th'y're in a orful state; our people. They can't get soldiers up. They 'aven't bin able to get enuf men together. Som'ns blown up the railways."

Rafael Brun suddenly woke to life.

"I say," he said savagely, "don't talk rot."

"Not rot," bubbled the man, "'s truth. Som'n's blown up the railways. Bridges, y'know, and rails and sleepers—torn them up they 'ave. And so no soldiers can——"

"I'm not going to believe a word of it,"

said Brun. "It's foolish nonsense. That. D'y' mean to tell me that men have blown up *our* railways—inside *our* lines——"

"Spies," said the little man decisively.

"Rubbish," annotated Rafael Brun.

The special reporter removed his lips from his pencil.

"No," he put in. "The feller is quite right. We *can't* get troops up. The bridges *are* down." The remark struck him as a good one. He entered it in the notebook.

"How d'y' know?" demanded Brun.

The special reporter gave the other a glance expressly indicative of the omniscience of special reporters. There was a palpable pause before he condescended to explain. He clipped his conversation with the accents of one much driven.

"Oh—oh, I want'd to send some pictures to my rag. Spoke to the stationmaster 'bout 'em. He tol' me that the line was broken. They sent a train out yesterday but it only got a little way before it had to come back. A bridge was blown up, you see. Awful wreck all over the river."

"And d'y' mean to say——"

"Why not? Somebody must 'a done it. There are spies all over the country, y' bet. The

Japanese had spies all over Manchuria behind the Russians when they fought them. They did things jus' the same as this. Blew up bridges. These fellers"—he pointed to the camp of the invaders—"ain't going to forget what the Japs did. They ain't going to be behind the Japs in cunning. Not these children. You bet. They've done it, you see." He turned back to the Bible of the nation, his notebook. "They us' ter say that all the waiters in the capital were spies onst upon a time," he ended dreamily.

Brun looked down at the two camps.

"Good Lord, there can't be any troops in our camp," he muttered. "What troops are in our camp? They can't have any."

The little man bustled in again.

"Oh, I dunno. They've a fewish number. Orl the country corps, y' know. An' reglars—they're from the county base. No end of volunteers, too."

"They say the g'ards coom down by moyter-cayr," said the man who had spoken first. "A 'unnerd moyter-cayrs coom in lars' nigh'. Da-ashed right down them g'ards—they're a good lot, them fellers——"

The special reporter began to speak. In his tone was the infallible knowledge of all military

science that two and a half days' special corresponding is bound to give. Listening to him, Clausewitz might have grown timid.

"Not enough," he said. "Not nearly. 'Opelessly outnumbered, they are. They 'aven't enough guns. An' no generals to speak of. An' stores! They've orful little stores. Orful little food and 'munition an' 'orses. They 'aven't got proper cloes or boots or fodder—bad way orl round, I can tell you."

The tiny group of men turned as though actuated by one lever and poured steady glances down into their own camp. They had the attitudes of true men anxious to tear from it its secrets. Their eyes had needle-point vigilance. If anything had happened in that camp it would not have escaped them. They saw in it a significant spot of corruption and inefficiency. They knew very well this must be so. The Press had said it. The Press never lies—in to-day's edition.

Nothing happened in the camp. It continued to lie sleepy and inactive under the sun. There were no outward advertisements of turmoil. There were no signs of chaos. It was a placid place.

Many thin fillets of smoke stood up erectly from the snub chimneys of as many camp ovens.

They fretted the air with their gauze-blue and trembling shafts. An imaginative decorative artist might have filled in each against the cobalt sky with a sweep of a full brush. It was a pretty sight. Also the unhurried and equable streaming of these smoke columns was reassuring. They seemed to argue that they could not be the fires they were if anything were wrong.

There was perceptible an orderly bustle about the camp. There were men manœuvring in squads on and about its grassy open places. They were going through amazing rituals of military exercise. From this distance their masses looked like the cubes and squares and parallels of an absurd geometrical lesson. The lesson was being drawn in brown upon the grass and then wiped quickly and fearfully out again.

Many men were in a swing of rising ground a hundred yards nearer the river than the camp, and paralleling it. They were feverishly flinging up earthworks. In their shirt sleeves they looked like inspired navvies. Their shovels beat into the soft earth with a snappy rhythm. Their backs lunged and straightened by clockwork. Snaky whipweals of yellow clay grew across the face of the country as they toiled.

Where a spinney broke the line a hundred men sweated at an abattis. Their axes flailed the trees in electric sweeps of light. The "tick-tock" of their mattocks called in woodpecker fashion. Straining teams of men rushed the felled trees into line. A single, infinitely wise person stood before the work and directed with cool gestures.

A farm building, at one place, was being loopholed, enclosed and generally tortured into defence. The rapping of hammers floated out of this building with rattling incessance. It was full of the hollow echo of empty rooms. It was like the industry of cabinet-makers nimble over a coffin.

Intelligent men were doing studious things with many ditches and hedges. The hedges grew denser and the ditches more abominable under their cunning ministrations.

Units of men were ventured out far towards the river, digging pits. They dug tiny, shallow pits with extraordinary concentration of purpose. When they had dug enough they hammered a stake into the bottom of the *trous de loup* and then walked elsewhere and dug again. They looked like purposeless prospectors searching endlessly for a mineral they never hoped to find.

Scores of men were lacing the ground before the trenches with an interminable mesh of wire.

Furtive men moved over the smooth surface, sowing the ground with explosive death.

Away back from the trenches many sly things were being done with brushwood. An elaborate screen and trench were constructed and then left. A foeman would, reasonably, expect to find something considerable hidden there. There was nothing hidden. Instead, the queer labourers went back many paces and dug and trenched again.

The special reporter looked at these unique operations for some minutes before he said :

“ Ah, screened gun-pits.”

At several points in the scheme of activity the massing and the vivacity of the labourers was more pronounced. The elaborate, polygon magnificence of field redoubts began to shape under magical wands. Out of nothing, elaborate erectments of *parapetto* and *banquette* and *casemate* were. Sandbagging and hurdles and *gabions* accumulated breathlessly. Formidable and enchanted strongholds grew up before the excited gaze of the watchers. The quick-cut celerity of construction impressed them. The certainty of design stimulated them. The

solid and warlike aspect of it made them feel good. It would take darn good soldiers to walk over that. Darn good soldiers. It was strong—strong.

The onlookers pulled themselves together. They stiffened their backs. They caught each other's eyes, and as this happened they nodded with good-humoured but settled conviction. It wasn't so bad after all.

"I guess we won't make a bad show after all," said the eager little man.

"Not us," said the special reporter.

Rafael Brun had been dreaming. He looked up. He glared at the complacent newspaper man.

"And if we do?" he demanded. The man looked puzzled.

"Hey?" he asked.

"And if we *do* make a bad show. If we do get beaten . . . well, what then?"

The reporter was distinctly taken aback.

"Oh, I don't know," he said. "Oh, I don't know."

"I do—this war goes on. Goes on, see?"

The newspaper man saw something. But not what Brun wanted him to see.

"Of course. Why, yes. It goes on. We get our fellers together again and we have

another shot. Of course, you don't think we'll give in just because we take a toss once, eh ? ”

“ No, I don't think we'll give in. That's it. We'll go on. Well, what will that mean—— ? ”

The newspaper man was rather tired of the topic. He adopted the flippant tone of the man desirous of changing an argument.

“ I know one thing it'll mean. It'll mean that I'll have the time of my life. It's the chance of a lifetime. It's the sort of chance every journalist dreams of. It's going to make me. I'm the only man who's been right on the spot from the beginning, and I'm the man that counts. It's a big solid scoop all through, my chap. And I'm scooping it.”

He waved his hands with a wild enthusiasm. Rafael Brun shrank from him.

“ My God, is that all you think of ? Your scoops, your red-hot-news, your blasted stinking headlines ? Doesn't it matter to you that the longer this war goes on the more people suffer ? The deeper these invaders go into the country the wider expands the circle of disaster and ruin. Ruin and famine and misery, and always to men who aren't *in* the war at all. Who aren't fighting. Whose only fault is that they

happen to get in the way. Doesn't *that* matter to you ? ”

The reporter looked at him in his most snapping manner. He fished for his notebook.

“Say,” he blurted, “that’s rather a good line to go on. Let’s have some more.”

CHAPTER VIII

THE BATTLE: THE BEGINNING

THE skirmishers pushed forward like little teasing insects. They danced and quivered over the ground like midges over water. Now and then some early morning light would leap from a polished surface. It might have come equally from wing surface or gun-barrel.

Large masses of soldiery were moving up ponderously. They hugged cover with distinguished tenacity. The positions for them were those that lay under hills. There was an adroit fervour in their continuous aversion to publicity. Amid these early morning shadows they were but denser shadows put in with a fuller brush. An unintermittent shuffling went up from each of these masses, and a low, droning murmur that might have been caused by anything from a bluebottle upward.

Harness creaked, boots scraped, rifle butts rasped in grit. An epidemic of coughing was defying suppression. Above each mass brooded

mounted officers regarding, with heroic, slightly contemptuous optimism, the greatest aggregation of hell fools in the division. It is one of the immutable laws of life that every infantry colonel commands the greatest aggregation of hell fools in the division.

At moments these inert masses would take life, swing into march, break forward and dissolve into the spray of the skirmishing lines.

They would push down towards the river, working away to the right, their solid columns cutting the vaporous fields like a gash. Then they would break. The long, solid columns would be lines ; going forward in thin, wafery lines, wave after wave in a perpetual and tidal swinging. And always forward and always inclined to that point on the right.

There was infinite craft in the progressive impulse of the men. They ran as poachers wary of a keeper. Their bodies were doubled in a clandestine but telling manner. They were past masters in the surreptitious. Their guns did not get between their legs and their hats did not blow off. They hugged and utilized all idiosyncrasies of ground or foliage with supreme but casual brilliancy. They had become so accustomed to being clever in this way that they had no chance to spoil it by

THE BATTLE : THE BEGINNING 87

pausing to admire the effect. It was part of their work, they had fallen into the good habit through infinite drilling. They scurried forward cheerfully in waves and waves, covering the ground with neat rapidity. Presently they stopped. They gathered together a great pool of men, snugly hidden in an unexpected *vlei*. The *vlei* turned at an angle round a hummock and entered swampily into the river. Across the river was the defending army. The gathered men, however, did not turn that angle and go for the enemy. They had suddenly lost all curiosity with regard to the enemy. The fine flowing energy that had brought them so far, evaporated. They lost all interest in the game. They abruptly became desirous of rest and breakfast. They squatted sullenly in the depression, serenely hidden from the defenders. They had breakfast. There was an orgy of adamantine biscuit and hot coffee out of vacuum canteens. When they were sated they lay on their backs and stared at the quickening morning.

The officers drew together and talked scandal, mostly of absent friends' wives. One captain explained how heaven and the War Board had arranged between them that his particular company should be the fit asylum

for the incurably insane. Thirteen other captains begged to differ . . . there were only thirteen other captains near enough to answer.

As it drew near a certain hour a colonel became furious with a watch he had strapped to his wrist. What was wrong with this watch was that it persisted in the dull philosophy of sixty seconds to the minute. The colonel looked at this watch when he had settled in his mind that half an hour had gone. Always, he saw, the watch had registered three minutes with infinite accuracy. The colonel fluently damned the inventor of horology. He had read somewhere that a fellow named Pope Sylvester II. was the creature. He had a fine fat curse for Sylvester.

Suddenly he looked again at his watch and immediately grew flurried. It was as though time had puckishly stolen a march on him. He had been driven desperately into a matter of moments. He plunged valkyrishly for the field telephone and began to gabble incoherence into it.

He gabbled and gabbled and put down the 'phone jerkily. He put his hand on his thighs and looked away intently towards the left.

A quick-cut crash of ordnance burst bonds with a thunderclap to the left.

CHAPTER IX

THE BATTLE: GENERAL ENGAGEMENT

THE whole front of the invading army started into life with this clap.

There was no building up. A moment ago there had been a bucolic silence on this pastoral stage. Now there was the hell-rage of an inspired hate. Battle had burst into being at a single crashing clamour. The titanic smash of doom, so long delayed, had, abruptly, arrived. It was making up for lost time.

A million guns appeared to have earth-quaked into spitting, animate venom at impulse. The atmosphere raved with their full-throated voices. The air squirmed and seethed with their Homeric red roarings. Tumult unspeakable raved to the sky and cracked the windows of heaven. Noise beat into the brain with hammers of brass until the brain became dulled and unconscious of it. It did not seem possible for one small universe to contain all this sound. It was the sheer dementia of hate.

Under the shock of the discharges the ground thrilled and quivered like a stung animal.

Confident in the chaperonage of the guns a myriad men coquetted forward. Soon the slopes by the river were full. The place was gorged with them. They looked like the crowd that breaks on to the football field at the whistle of time.

There were, however, differences. There was an ordered disorderliness about the progress of these men. They ran in lines. The mathematics of these lines was a curious thing, yet they were lines. They spread along the face of the advance in wavering, irregular pencillings. The men looked like beaters, at so much an hour, flushing phlegmatic pheasants for *nouveau riche*.

These advance movements were in short rushes. A squad would get up and run and flop down. As it flopped another squad was up and running. All along the front this queer movement proceeded. Much to the chagrin of the rearward squad, they never quite caught the first. The first was always up and running at the instant of their fellow's arrival. There was a slightly vulgar "Yah-but-you-didn't-quite-cocky" aspect about them. The others,

however, were never disheartened. They continued their fruitless chase, always. They were, decidedly, sports.

Behind them, too, followed at a distance another filming line of men. These kept a registered pace apart. They had no desire to spoil fun, but if they were wanted—well, here they were.

Behind this line were fat black columns palpitating with eagerness to be off. They looked like dogs throating against the leash.

The reporter who sat at Brun's ear undertook to tell him, in spite of the guns, many thrilling truisms about firing lines and supports. Brun noticed that his nose writhed in eloquence. He heard sounds like the dull snuffing of a dog. It was not very interesting. He looked away on to the battle.

The battle and the ground lay under him neatly picked out in flat colours. The fields had a moist green sleekness. The grass looked tender. Where there were other colours they looked singularly fresh and vivid. The cream sides of the farmhouse away to the far left might have been painted yesterday. This farm had also maroon-coloured shutters that hung against the walls like wounds. The defenders had not removed a clump of ger-

aniums from an upper window. The burning flowers gleamed like drops of blood.

As he regarded it this sylvan place began to squirt thin jets of topaz flame. He realized startlingly that there were soldiers in the farm; and that they shot at something. He turned his eyes a little to note what it was they shot at.

The movement of the battle had developed astonishingly during that short time. A pushing movement had sprung up. Men were piling up on the river-bank opposite these farm buildings. It had become an object of spirited and vehement attention. A great clump of trees crowded to the water's edge there, and the earth banked and cliffed up curiously. It was good cover. The invaders were aware of it. There was also a shallow ford at this point. The invaders were aware of that. It was, perhaps, a most vital weakness in the defending position.

Men were piling up at this place. The running lines converged upon it with singular unanimity. They came together with an elastic pull as they neared the trees. Enormous quantities of running men flung into them. The giant snowball of assault was gathering force.

This place became packed and choked with

humanity. Brun wondered how they could all hide there unseen. Fringes of them came into sight, using the tongue of trees and hedge that lipped along the bank as an impromptu trench. They lay down on their bellies behind these breastworks, firing frantically. With a pang Brun saw the flickering squirt of their many rifles jetting death towards the stubborn farm. It was only now that his eyes had seen, that his ear caught the tearing "rip—rip—rip" of rifle shooting.

The cheeky invaders were not having the game all their own way. The defending force had become urgent with its leaping counter response. Brun could see great wedges of men coming forward into the trenches that supported the farm. The trenches ran men and filled up, like gutters under an overflow. The raging spit of the rifles waxed and grew and grew. It had a thin, sharp, savage note, like a scream. It was out to kill.

It was killing.

Men came to fall down continuously with the strange sudden manner of the abruptly dead. They fell down like empty sacks. They fell down still full of jerky life. They lay in odd and impossible attitudes as though carefully posed there by an eccentric artist. Some fell

clutching with clawlike, bloody fingers at mythical aerial supports. Others went up and came down—crash.

Sometimes men lay as though sleep had come to them very softly. Sometimes they writhed with all the kicking fervour of smitten horses. Some fell flopping, and after a second began to crawl. The fields were full of crawling live things and silent dead things, sprawled and impossibly angular under the sun. There is no mistaking the utter negation of death.

The torment of the battle writhed up and up round the ford by the farmhouse.

Artillery joined into this battling. The guns that had been nosing and sweeping opposing lines in a general and casual manner now turned and leaped at this spot with grateful, full-bodied concentration. They had the aspect of dilettante souls turning suddenly from the casual, to work that satisfied them immensely. They went into the business with redoubled jumping effort. They surpassed themselves. The shout of the firing roared up in gusts about this place. It was the vortex of fury whirling in a stupendous wrangle.

The air became thick with the smashing discharge of the shells. There was never a cessation of the soft circled billows of shrapnel.

Everlasting repeating crackers of appalling detonation were soaring in the air. The soft vapour of their shattering efforts mingled and boiled and swathed up like escaping steam. It veiled up in ragged indolence over the trees. At a fixed height a little wind caught it and sent it drifting and sagging in torn stretches away out of the fight to the south-west.

The shrapnel bullets swished into the trees by the river with scythe-like cuts. The trees shivered under the swishing hail. The ground beat up in fluffy "phuffs." It was as though the thong of a whip had slashed the sun-baked, grassless earth under the trees. The trees began to shed leaves and twigs and branches in mournful showers. One tree was struck at the base, and it came down crashing, tearing through the others in long, angry scarrings. The whipping of the bullets through the bush near the ground filled the air with thin splinters. The bark of the trees split and shed in a thousand white flashing particles. Their flying shingles made tearing, ragged, hideous wounds.

Over the farm buildings the seductive billowing of shrapnel explosion was less in evidence. There was a more sinister vapour. Greasy wreaths of yellow-green smoke rose from where the flight of shell ended. These wreaths

were bosomed in vast cascades of brown far-flung earth. The invaders had deemed it cleverest to fire common shell at the farm buildings.

The invading guns acted the telling rôles of giants cast to smash down the defence of this farm by sheer weight of metal. They slung shell into and about it with whirlwind velocity. They were pumping death into it. They were determined to efface all resistance as soon as possible. Detonations circled it in fire. The bulbs of shrapnel explosion were as gems of evil lustre in this sinister coronal. The steel voice of the thousand rifles in the trees upon the bank screamed termagant exultance and encouragement of this well-organized and excellent slaughter. More guns came flinging into the episode: more men piled up and up into the trees about the ford—ready to rush.

In the farm buildings and the trenches about the farm buildings many thousands of very brave men cowered and fought doggedly. They racketed their rifles off at that copse across the river before them. They did it with the screwed courage of desperate men. They had decided that though there was no hope for them it was wisest to make the best of a grim matter. They stung the whole face of the enemy with a bitter whipping of musketry.

Shells were sinking into these men from every point. They could not escape them. They loped in at the back and they punched in from the front. The works were not meant for stopping high-power shells. Somebody had proved the invaders could not have carried big guns. They had worked it out with many figures . . . and the great howitzer shells sank shuddering and avalanching into the frail ranks of the defenders.

They came in at all angles and from all sides. There was no eluding them. The defenders felt hopelessly inefficient under their showering. They had a Caliban-like ineptitude. They were willing and avid to strike back, to expend useful blows, but someone must first show them just where to strike back. They peered about like tormented fools seeking the hand that flapped them, and always missing it. The guns showered into their faces the ceaseless peltings of violent death.

The ground about was pitted by the shells with holes like the lid of a giant pepper-box. Huge hands slashed slicing scars in the defences. Shrapnel was stabbing and drenching the trenches with death.

A great shell took a barn and it went down in roaring crumbings. A shutter was caught and

slammed into showering particles against the wall. A shell bumped and ploughed and bumped again through what had been a fruit garden. It flung up vast smoking clouds of mould. It detonated against the scullery wall with a huge and crimson bang. The wall shivered, was quiescent. Then it slid quietly to the ground. As though revealed by a drop scene, the peaceful interior of a neat scullery became obvious. A puckish bullet plunged into the full plate-rack and splashed fragmentary crockery over the walls with a wanton hand. Three shells struck the front wall of the house simultaneously, and a great hole was. When the smoke and dust had whisked away from this hole half a man hung, like a rag, out of it. He dripped down the wall. In the trenches the dead and the writhing were becoming an intolerable nuisance.

A bloody officer stood on a pail elongating his neck like a great cock to look over the smoke. His chin lifted and sidled interrogatively, showing the scarlet and gold gorgets of a general officer.

“B’ Gord, why don’t they come on?” he was crying. “Why t’ Gord don’t they? If they’d come on, only. Why t’ Gord——?”

A youngish officer beside him queried:

"Are they movin'? Can y' see if they're movin'——?"

The other officer paid him no attention.

"Why t' Gord can't they come?"—he was crying—"only let us have a slap at 'em." His tone suggested that almost any enemy would be good fellows enough under the circumstances to allow themselves to be slapped at.

The young officer suggested:

"P'r'aps they won't come. P'r'aps——"

The other turned and snorted disgust.

"Course they'll come. Course. What t' hell else d'y' think they're going to do? What else——?"

The young officer didn't know. He said:

"Oh, I dunno—p'r'aps——"

The general officer did not desire answer.

"What t' hell else are they giving us ginger for—hey? What t' hell else?" And "Where else could they go, hey? Where? Nowhere. There isn't anywhere else. This ford's the only place, m' boy. We gotter hold this. If we hold this we're alri'. We've got to hold it. Key of the thingummy——"

"I dunno," said the young officer.

"You're talking blather."

"They might get 'er pontoon," suggested the junior. "They might easily get 'er pontoon."

"You're talking blather," shouted the general again. "I tell you they'll come here. Nowhere else, see! We've got to hold on, just hold on damn tight——"

The young officer stood peering through the hurling smoke. His tingling eyes stabbed about in little darting glances. He regarded with incuriosity the shrapnel as it flogged the packed trenches. Even as he looked a group of half a dozen men spun like skittles and then withered to the ground.

"I tell you they'll come here," the general was shrieking.

"Well, let 'em come soon," said the younger man; "they're giving us a hell of a pounding, b' God. Absolutely the limit. Y' know if they don't come darn quick we won't have enough men——"

"Tha's alright," snapped the other. "I've juist 'phoned for more. I've explained to the C.O. We're gettin' the 'Leventh in 'er minnit."

The junior officer looked up, startled.

"Oh, I say," he fish-mouthed, "the Eleventh. I say. Why, that'll queer the lines a bit. The Eleventh. That'll leave the front darn weak, eh? We've had the Fourth an' half the Fortieth—and now the Eleventh—there'll only be those

irregular beggars left. Not much backbone, hey, for 'er——?"

"Can't be helped," jerked the other, "we must hold this. This is the key of the position. We mus' hold——"

"Look out," screamed the junior. "Here they are. Jeheew."

The ford, at a flash, had become dense with charging soldiery. They belched torrentially from the trees and from the banks. They came running through the river in fat, pushing swarms. It was all men and no river. Shells sank with scarlet flares into the bowels of the swarm, but they flashed on. A projectile hit a group of men in the front ranks and it blew them to rags. There were others over the spot when the smoke lifted. The water was stirred and fouled and sloppy with the whirling of the men. It ran muddy. There were long, torn-up streaks of thick, dull crimson scarring it. It broke and slopped about and thrashed in a jumbled and hiccupy manner. It was torn and lashed with the whipping of the flaring shrapnel.

The voice of the rifles rose to a scream. There was a frenzied, fearful defiance in it. It was like a woman shrilling boastful imprecations loudly to screen her quaking terror. The

flame of the rifles stabbed and cut the air in a thousand lancelike jets. It was fervid and incessant. It never faltered or broke. Maxims jetted and dribbled with the amazing celerity of the garden hose. Death was turned on at the tap. A light quick firer, called a "pom-pom," bit and coughed and choked in the teeth of the advance. The tiny shells seared and flamed and burnt in stringing lines.

The river was full of squirming objects, twisting and snaking like eels. The water churned and bubbled red foam about these figures. At some places it jerked and curdled whity-brown as the stubborn dead thrashed it with arms and heels. Occasionally it merely washed sleekily to and fro in a glassy manner over the popping eyes of some fire-burst mother's son. It bore queer argosies of bodies that refused to sink, upon a lazy flow to wherever its mouth might be.

Frequency of violent and ugly dissolution did not check the fiendish tumult of the fighting. The battle expanded in violence and piled up. The roar of grappling armies swole up in stupendous and colossal dinnings. The place belched an unspeakable throb of noise. More and more men became actuated by intense desire to be killed or kill down there in the

mud-batter before the farm. Troops flowed forward. Thick, squat columns of invading infantry wormed, nosing, down to the bank. Quick-flung flurries of men rushed thither. Terrible magnets attracted them. They flung into the mêlée as footballers fling into the squirm of a scrum. They piled and piled thicker. They fought, swaying and rocking backwards and forwards in frantic effort of mastery. Guns pushed up sneakingly and sought to add to the scramble with vicious enfiladings. The vortex of battle-sound writhed and swirled to the sky.

The reporter leaned out over the edge of the hill and cried out in a delirium of excitement.

"Crrr," he burst. "They won't get through." He hit Brun on the elbow. "Crrr, they won't get through. We'll beat 'em back. Look, we're holding 'em easy—and there goes another regiment." A long, swinging worm moved out of the trenches. "We'll give 'em ginger. Hee!"

Rafael Brun glared down at the tumble of the fight and the regiment that was now leaving the lines. There seemed too many men round the fight, too little in the works. Each hurried reinforcement had left their lines more woefully denuded.

"I hope so," he told the reporter. "But I think they're taking too many men from the trenches. They're enfeebling——"

"Oh, rot," shouted the newspaper man. "Fat rot. You're jaundiced. Can't you see truth when it's there to see? Look down there. Hain't we holding 'em, hey? Course we are. We've got 'em easy—held. An' when that regiment gets in—by jimmy, we'll roll 'em back. Push 'em back, sir. Can't you see that? Roll 'em back, go right through them—counter-attack, b' Gawd——"

"I don't like the way they weaken the lines," said Brun. "They're piling up all the men there as if it were all the battle. The trenches are empty. If anything should miss fire——"

"*If* anything should miss fire. But nothing will miss fire. Here, what's the matter with you? Are our chaps such a lot of duffers that their winning must mean that something's wrong? You're talking idiotically. If anything misses fire? If any—here, what the blazes d'y' think could miss fire? There's the battle, there's our weakness, that ford. They know it, they're all fighting for it. Natural. What could miss fire——?"

Brun screwed his lips, shrugged his shoulders.

"It might be a feint," he said.

"A feint—oh, lord—what fool sort of feint——"

Brun abruptly sat back on his heels.

"By Christ," he whispered. "I thought it. Yes, it's a feint. By Christ——"

A sudden spurt of men had abruptly appeared on the far, neglected right of the battle. They came as though a screening cloth had been tugged from off them. They poured irresistibly from the depth of an overlooked *vlei* that had hidden them completely. They rushed, silent but full of menacing purpose, for the river and the weak defending lines on the other side of the river.

CHAPTER X

THE BATTLE: THE END

THE colonel had gone with an irritant frequency to the lip of the *vlei*, where he could watch, unobserved, the battle. He had held interminable and multitudinous conversations over the field telephone. He appeared to be ever demanding something and never being satisfied. The jumping roar of the battle that had come to him all day had pricked and goaded his spirit in an intolerable manner. He wondered whether General Officers Commanding, after all, were to be trusted in ticklish business like this.

The men about him, when they had finished sausage and biscuits and coffee, lay on their backs and went to sleep. If they woke up they talked to each other a great deal about weight-lifting. The officers sat on their heels and pretended that they had no idea of sleeping. One of them told many Rabelaisian stories about a singularly wicked career which he fondly hoped had been his. The others listened to him

THE BATTLE: THE END 107

because nobody else was talking. Nobody heard all that he said. His voice prosed on in a flat monotone. They heard it as the diner hears a band in a glittering restaurant. It plays there because somebody has paid for it. Why it plays, God only knows.

When not attending to the wicked past of the subaltern, they watched the unique antics of their colonel. They were rather inclined to think that he was on a royal road to madness. If orders did not come through soon he was bound to go mad. It was a pleasant and sportive preoccupation to speculate which would arrive first, orders or insanity.

The orders arrived first.

The firing away to the unseen left had risen to an appalling and incredible riot of hate. Something tremendously momentous went forward there. They had all sat erect and tense, listening to it, endeavouring to gauge its real meaning. Some had hot visions of red annihilation swarming atop of them as they lay defenceless and out of sight; others had black, hateful fancies of an enemy being beaten, crushed, driven from the field without themselves having any chances of joining in the jolly slaughter. They felt hurt at the neglect.

Others, more knowing, guessed what was to

be their part, and began to get ready. They shed kit and harness and all impedimenta surreptitiously. They wanted to be first in the killing if possible.

About three o'clock the colonel stood up from the telephone and mouthed out snappy orders. He shouted fiercely and waved his arms with a lively savagery. At once bustle broke out in the pit of the *vlei*. More coats and kit were flung aside. Cartridge belts were hitched to the handy position over the hip. Each man examined his rifle with intense and holy zeal. Rifles had suddenly become most potent and yet delicate engines. Grits were brushed off them with elaborate care. The men fell into line and looked sidelong and anxiously at their officers. The officers looked back at them, trying to find out how many cowards each had in his company. The whole mass of the men shifted and shuffled in a creeping expectancy.

The man who had remained at the telephone lifted his head after a minute. He looked straight at the colonel, who had gone to the front of the men. The man at the telephone let his eyebrows run up, and his nose twitched quickly. His mouth opened narrowly.

"Now," he spat.

THE BATTLE : THE END 109

The regiments bunched and jumped clear of the *vlei*.

They burst to the scene in an irresistible manner, and, in a lunging, clattering rush made for the river. They rushed as one man. Their dash was terrific. They made the bank at a bound, and in a bound were in the river and rushing across it. They had no difficulty ; there was a possible ford here. Not many people knew of it, but the invaders did. Two of their officers disguised as cobblers had lived three months in this district. They had earned very little money at cobbling, but they had learnt quite a lot as soldiers. For ten seconds the river was brown with packed soldiers.

In a flash the regiments were through the river and sprinting up the gentle slope that led to the weakened trenches. Not even yet had the defenders gauged the situation. Hardly a score of rifles spoke to beat them back.

"By Christ," howled Brun, "they'll smash us."

The invaders went up the hill with a roaring flush. There was nobody to stop them. The guns were engaged elsewhere. At that feint attack on the farm, for example. Before they could be got to bear the thing was done. It was a matter of moments. The crucial act of a battle is frequently but a matter of moments.

The feeble and fluttering spit of the entrenched rifles was childishly futile.

The invaders flowed and swept on like a rising torrent. They flooded over the glaxis. In a second they were breaking into the elaborate, half-empty trenches like water over a sluice. They whisked the defenders away before them like straw. There was a brief, nerveless shooting, a feeble resistance, a stumbling and muffling in the trench. The resistance went out like blown smoke. Flared and was gone like a flame in straw. One of the most elaborate field redans was captured and the back of the defence broken.

Like a great solid wedge, more and more infantry poured forward in the trail of the rush. They drove deep into the defence. The defence was split asunder. The feeble segments were rolled back. The confused men tumbled over their comrades in the trenches in their endeavours to meet the attack on the flanks. A horrid, snarling and ghastly confusion arose. Men fought and hacked in a red, raw mêlée. For thirty seconds it lasted. Then, like a puff of smoke, it was all over.

The reporter plunged his face into the scented turf and was ill.

THE BATTLE : THE END III

"Oh, my Gawd!" he moaned. "Oh, my Gawd! Oh, my Gawd!"

Rafael Brun was sprinting down hill for his motor-cycle. He saw that the invaders once through must overrun the whole country. There was now nothing strong enough to resist them for miles.

He had resisted the evil thought up to this. He was a man habitually given to putting ugly and uncomfortable considerations behind him. Now he was forced to face this one. He had dallied with the idea that the relentless onward march of the invaders would be checked at this battle. That the war would end. That no further horrors would happen. Now he knew that he had never really believed these thoughts. They belonged to his habitual state of putting off the evil day. The war would go on. The horrors would continue.

That was why he ran with such impetuosity to his motor-cycle. His home, that of his friends and that of the woman he was going to marry, lay directly in the march of armies. He saw in a flaming vision how war might engulf them all.

With a burning soul he sprang upon his machine. He drove it frantically along side-roads for home.

CHAPTER XI

ROUT

THE ardour of the defending forces caved under the squirted stroke of the invaders as a tower of cards crashes under the just application of an applied fist. It crumpled and wilted all along the line under the blow, like a frail fabric of built-up sticks. The regiments flung in seething confusion into each other's arms. Chaos was. In a flash the lines had broken to a thousand flying splinters. The beaten legions poured over the country in a huddle of frantic and panic-stricken animation.

The fields became alive with men running with the heedless impetuosity of scared sheep. They ran in delirious companies over meadow land, sprinting for the nearest, quickest avenues of escape, which were the roads. They broke to these and raced them, snorting livid terror.

As they ran they got rid of all the august impedimenta of war which rule a man out of it in sport events. They shed their kit. Can-

teens and coats and haversacks fluttered to the ground in an eccentric meteorological descent. Rifles were flung generously into hedges. Ditches came thick brown masses of cartridge belts. Inspired idiots flung their very tunics to the winds, stripping them as they ran with urgent fingers. All lunged forward in batlike and headlong blundering.

All along the roads was murder. Men fought with men to get away first. Where? They knew not where. The jumping, horsed wagons fought with the men.

Service wagons scattered down the roads through lanes they themselves carved in the men, with terrific impetuosity. The horses whipped and snatched at the traces, and the carts leaped, bumping, behind. Gun teams went along with the breakneck habit of the guns. The churning gun-wheels made batter out of the road—and whatever humanity chanced to be in the road. The foaming horses slashed great furrows through the tide of the flying. Their passages were as furrows in wet sand. The sand oozed together at once after the passing. Doltlike and gibbering cavalry yelped, clattering, through the rabble. The fear-blind men were flung in showers before the upflung horses' knees. The horsemen them-

selves beat forward savagely with their sabres, in the wanton destruction of self-preservation. If one of their number went down, he stayed down with those their horses had floored. The pumping iron of the hoofs squelched flat his humanity. The fallen horses lashed and stabbed with wild feet at all within reach. The hoofs went home with soft, warm thuddings.

The invaders were firing into the rout.

And all along the road, in the thicket of sweating and raving terror, the great shells sank. They exploded in giant flares of incandescence, smashing life out of scores.

The guns fired monotonously into the herded confusion of panicky men. They were admirably positioned, and they loosed off with mechanical and clocklike equanimity. They made precise noises with the accents of pedantry. They were behaving as conscientious exemplars of the "way it should be done." There was the note of a laudable affectation in their uproar. They were even-tempered, mathematical and tranquil. There was nothing to flurry them. They were as blasé players indulging in an improving gamble at which the winning move always came their way. Sighting with composed hauteur, under altogether charming circumstances, the gunners lobbed neat, fat

shells into those squirming gouts of humanity where most could be pulped at a blow. Their practice was excellent. They were realizing the truth that, given the perfect circumstances, wholesale slaughter could be raised to a fine art.

Their huge shells fell into compact clumps of men, exploded in thick, swathing fumes and blasted companies into dribbling wreckage. It was a most amusing game. The gunner made elaborate bets on the beauties of the slaying.

Streaming and admirably handled regiments of cavalry were splashing through the sullen pools of blood that tessellated the battle-field and rushing quick, stabbing charges into the densities of the fleeing mob.

They spread all along, up and down the rout, hacking and slashing with a breezy good purpose, their red sabres swung high, pointing to God in morbid gleamings of dull blood. They swung down into the rout, cutting it and re-cutting through it. The sabres, working like flails, rose up and went down in curious and pretty flutterings. The horses bucked and sidled furiously, breathing flame and glaring goggled hatred. Their flanks were dappled with the raining drip of the swords.

At one part a body of defending infantry—Guards—strung out loosely, and, with steady rifles, beat into the face of the invading rush. They manœuvred with sublime and Olympian order in this saturnalia of chaos. They were as inductile as creatures made of metal. Their intense unacceptance of the reigning disorder about them had the colour of sneers. They were souls high above and indifferent to their stricken fellows. The frantic and loose habits of these runaways were no concern of theirs. They had arrived at the conclusion that their office was to stand there and shoot ceaseless volleys at the pursuing foeman. They stood there and shot ceaseless volleys at the pursuing foeman.

The ripping crash of their formal firing clipped a clear, flat field in a quadrant before them. Attacking foemen rushed up to the line of this quadrant and died with decision and promptness. The quadrant was as the sacred *tapu* line of a drastic paganism. The clear space between it and the loosely strung Guards was holy ground. To walk upon that ground was more than one might venture. The attack paused there and fell down dead in heaps. The guns gouged long, hot channels of death through the Guards, but their fire still ripped

with methodical routine, and the line of the quadrant remained irretrievably defined. A palisade might have been erected at that point.

Great blocks of stumbling infantry were jerked at these stony, frigid and aloof men. Regiments came floundering at them in immense rushes. Parties of imaginative slaughterers wormed to the flanks, crawling between the heaped corpses on the shamble floor that had been a battle-field, to gall them. The line remained imperturbable.

Cavalry, employing all the panoply and uproar of the shock, catapulted at the frigid ranks of invincible soldiery. In the acknowledged manner of cavalry they came back dragged and drooping and covered with the dreary futility of their fatuous office. The guns continued to gouge long, raw channels through their defending ranks. The volleys of answering defiance still ripped and ripped with the methodical routine of sensible clockwork.

Behind this frail dike that stemmed the flood of carnage the rout went streaming, in some respite, out of the range of death.

The attack roared and swung at the stubborn line, clamouring in wolverine gluttony for the rich orgy that lay behind. The loosely strung

Guards beat with steady rifles into the face of the seething rush. They remained as imperturbable as death.

Round this nucleus the voice of the miniature battle went up in crimson frenzy. The swirling sea of invasion was swamping in upon this one small rock and endeavouring to crush it. Every faculty of decimation was exerted to exterminate this obstinate band of casual demi-gods. Regiments lined out upon bellies and swished wicked, smashing volleys into the band. All the guns in the fight nosed round and gave them attention. The engulfing thunder of hate soaked the air with a heavy, thick roar. A pulsing cloud of thunder-sound throbbed and brooded over the place. Concentrated death pelted into the contumacious Guards with meteorological effect. The loosely strung line dropped, melted and went out.

A thin, filming drizzle began to fall as the guns and the mafficking cavalry got back to their jolly business of ragging the rout. The great shells swished into the packed jam of the fields and roads again. The cavalry went in and finished where the shells left off. The frantic men on the greasy high road slipped and scrambled and blindly fought for a security that would never be theirs. They fought and

clouted their way forward with feverish hopelessness. They had no attention for anything else. The shrapnel that spattered into the bobbing skulls only killed. It did not demoralize. The flying creatures were demoralized beyond demoralization. They were not cowed into inactivity. Unless hit, they gave no attention to the shelling. They simply fought and bit and pushed for the first places. Their outrageous desire was insensate. They were debauched with fear.

A shell dropped on to an ammunition caisson and it blew up in a monstrous eruption of fire and sound. Men were blasted, and spattered in shreds all whither, and the road was pitted and torn. The unhurt closed up at once and ran on. A shell hit a horse and dashed it into a wedge of humanity. The felled men who were unharmed picked themselves up and ran. A service wagon was caught, lifted and slewed broadside across the road ; a thin, viperish flame leaped and tongued over it. In a breath a hundred hands had torn the wagon plank from plank, and the rout was surging, stamping over the still smouldering debris. The corpses of the fallen were trodden and ground beneath stumbling, heedless soles. They made a bloody, clotted mess, greasing the

greasy road. On some occasions a person with energy would kick a corpse into a deep ditch. The ditches quickly filled up with utterly unrecognizable humanity, stamped out of recognition to a marvellous degree. They began to stink hideously. The foul, sour reek of much blood filled the air with a thick, heavy poison.

When the cavalry broke into the mass, the pitiful fugitives ran, shambling, from them like aimless sheep; they did not attempt defence. They put up their elbows and ran with cringing, hidden faces. They were like suddenly startled pedestrians, warned by a shout of the fall of a chimney, but hopelessly unaware of its line of gravity. They ran, neither looking up nor protesting, merely running. It was poor slaying.

Gradually the cavalry grew tired of it. The guns withdrew. The splutter of the infantry fire ebbed down and down, drooping to odd and disconnected shots. It ceased. Only the gentle, dewing, clammy rain continued, and the rout. The quietly active figures of the Medical Corps were nosing round the piled and acrid fetor of the battle-field for chance sparks of life.

CHAPTER XII

VÆ VICTIS

RAFAEL BRUN stood in the muddy road before a miniature grouping of five aloof cottages. He waved his hands, and with his mouth endeavoured to say many wise and soothing things.

A stream of Æneas-souled people poured along this road that passed the five cottages. They pursued their purpose with the gait of panic. They carried with them immense quantities of effronting domestic gear. Some, like the ancient Trojan, carried it on their backs. Others had this gear piled in push-carts or in heavy and clumsy farm-wains. Most of these people refused to avail themselves of the luxury of listening to Rafael Brun's eloquence. They pushed on, and ever on, stubbornly. They were mulish in their terror. Some, however, held at the sound of his voice, and came sidling out of the spate of people, and hung to the fringes of the tiny crowd about him.

This crowd was made up of multi-voiced, vehement and anxious people. These stood about Brun, lifting up their chins in the drizzle as they put crazed questions. Rafael Brun lifted his hands unceasingly, emphasizing and uttering the self-same truth numberless times.

"Yes, go on if you like," he shouted. "If it relieves you, yes, of course, go on. But listen to this against it. You're going on to—where?"

"We're going on to the town," spurted a thin, keen voice with the violence of a jet. Brun swung in the direction of the voice.

"If you get there. You've got to get there first. Think of that. You've got to get there first. It's fifteen miles away. That doesn't sound much, but I tell you it's an awful lot. Look at the road." He swept his hand to the clutter of hurrying figures and conveyances on the road. "This is only a side road. It's packed. Packed and only a side road—you can only get along it at a crawl. What are the main roads going to be like, hey? What will your pace be on the main roads?"

The crowd shifted like so many scholars facing, with embarrassment, a poser. A thick voice said :

"Oh, it'll be easier on the main roads. Main roads bigger, 'n' better, 'n' wider, 'n'——"

"And all the scampering families in the country will be on 'em," clinched Brun. "Where you've got one family on this road there'll be ten on a main road."

"Well," dogged the voice, "the main road's bigger 'n'——"

"Not at all well," snapped Brun. "Damn ill. The main road will be glutted. Too full for words. There'll be no moving along it. What then, hey? When you're jammed and can't get along—what then?"

"We'll get along all right—somehow."

Rafael Brun expanded with infinite scorn.

"Somehow, yes, somehow—you'll get there somehow and at some time—God knows when. Meanwhile, you'll spend days on the road—and nights too. And not you only but the women who go with you and the children. Nights in this bad weather and in the open country—without protection. It's raining now. Most of you are wet through. There's no chance of getting dry. It'll go on being wet. You'll go on getting wet. What'll happen when you get sick through the wet?"

"Still, it'll be all right if we get to the town," persisted the obstinate voice.

"And then"—jerked Brun—"what if the enemy cuts you off before you get there?"

"Naught in that," said the dogged man. "They'll cut us off anyhow if we stay. It's a chance. If we don't pull through to the town we're no worse off than if we'd stayed."

Rafael snorted his disgust.

"You make me tired. Why talk rubbish, man? How the devil do you expect to be better off in the town? What d'y' think the town'll be like? There'll be all the people of the country-side into it, the troops clutting it. There'll be an awful scarcity—lodgings, stores and food. How can the town accommodate you all? There'll be a hideous congestion——"

"Anyhow," persisted the other, "I guess I'll be better off there than here. I might just as well go to the town as stay here——"

Another nervous voice called out quickly. It was a voice vibrating with eager jerkiness. Its owner had suddenly thought of a good point that would cause Brun to look exceedingly stupid, and he was anxious to score.

"Well then, well then," screamed this minor-toned voice. "Well then, if you don't want us to go to town, what do you want us to do, eh? What do you want us to do? What are we to do?"

Brun stilled the nervous scream with his hand.

“Stay here,” he cried. “Stay at home.”

The crowd threw incredulity at him in a burst of jeering laughter.

“Why not?” he demanded.

Their scornful grunts came at him again. He waved his hands at them in a gesture of infinite rage.

“Look here,” he cried, “you’re a lot of fools. You think because your blasted country’s invaded the invaders are going to act like a lot of murderers. You’re fools. They won’t hurt you. Why should they hurt you? If you’d only stay in your homes and live peaceably they wouldn’t touch you. The fighting’s done with us now. There’d be no more fighting here, and as long as you’d keep quiet it’d be all right.”

A strong and scornful voice rose out of the crowd.

“That’s true enough, mister,” it said; “but what are we goin’ to eat?”

The crowd broke out in clamorous agreement. Here was a most practical prophet. What were they going to eat? That was “what.”

Rafael put his fists upon his hams, his short,

plump figure balancing erect. He shot a look of immeasurable superiority into the faces of the crowd. He consciously assumed the delphic circumambience of one who could say a great deal but is cute enough not to. Internally he was scraping in his mind for some neat sentence that would settle these intemperate hecklers at once and with such brilliant finality that they would never speak again. He could not help feeling that there was a biting and brilliant answer somewhere if he could but light on it. If he could produce that answer he was a made man. But he never found that dazzling and final retort.

The crowd, meanwhile, howled at him. They were not at all deceived by that all-wise look. They repeated the irrefutable sentence again and again to show how satisfied they were with its effectiveness. Some, to show distinguished originality, as much as to break the monotony of the chant, said also :

“ Yes, and where are we going to live ? ”
Or : “ How’er we going to live ? ”

A great and solid man pushed his way to within a foot of Rafael Brun. By sheer excess of girth and height he made himself felt. He was one of those admirable people who start

their dialogue not only without a preface, but also more or less towards the end. He jerked his nose up a little in Brun's face as he spoke. He continued to jerk as he went on. It was a pugnacious rendering of a mild St. Vitus affliction. The storm of questioning gradually subsided before his classic vehemence. He shouted :

"Came to my place, they did. Lot of 'em. Nice spoken, they were too. Very gentleman-like, but there was no monkey tricks about 'em. They came after my stock, an' they came after my fodder, an' they came after whateffer bloomin' else they could pinch. A scraggy man comes to me and 'e says, in a clicky sort of way of speaking: 'Folkard . . . Samuel . . . Valley Farm . . . 'unnerd an' four akers . . . 'E was looking at papers, blue and white ones. I looked 'em in the face—straight. I'd show 'em.

"'Wot it's got to do with you, I dono,' I ses sharp, 'but it's me alright, and my place.'

"'E was lookin' at papers. 'E didn't look up. 'E begun speakin', but to 'imself, like. 'E ticked off things. 'Large paddock—graze half a squadron. Twenty-five milch cows. Thirteen very fit bullocks. One bull—oldish.

Four draught horses, but one not up to hard field requirements. Four large barns. Four tons of swedes and mangles in barns a year ago. Horse-food for thirty mounts for six days should be got out of this farm. There are three stack of hay and one or two of straw on this farm. Well, and Company's water. Bad cooking arrangements. Seven rooms to house, vehicles in low state of repair. Pigs kept. Last year a litter of ten pigs. Chickens. Bad place for defence.' 'E looked up at me. 'His that alright?' 'e ses?

" 'Very funny,' I ses.

" 'His it alright?' 'e said.

" 'Oh, it's alright,' I tole 'im, 'as far as it goes. I gotter noo patent 'arrer, too. An' a seeder. The baby's gotter perambulator. An' there's my wife's mother's foter 'anging on the wall'—I was sarcastic like.

" 'E 'adn't a bump of comic. Shook 'is 'ed serious.

" 'Not important,' 'e ses. . . . 'Is the list kerrect?'

" 'No,' I ses, 'ittaint. The ole 'orse is dead an' I gotter noo Clydesdale——'

" 'Ur,' 'e whistled. 'That it.' 'E grabbed at 'is papers with a pencil. Made a funny quiggling mark——"

"Short'and," interrupted a voice. "W'en they come to my——"

The voice of the big man crushed forward.

"Perhaps," he pursued. "Eny'ow, I got savidge. I sed to 'im: 'Well, hif hit his himportant or hit hisn't. Wot the 'ell——?'

"'E looked at me curious.

"'We 'ave use for all these things, Mr Folkard,' 'e remarks. 'We 'ave to take them.'

"I looked at 'im, you can bettcher shirt. 'Lummy,' I ses. 'Watcher takin'?''

"'E said it again.

"'We are to take all these things. They're requisitioned. We 'ave use for 'em.'

"'I'll see you damned!' I ses, just like that.

"'E shrugged 'is funny shoulders in a dam silly forrin way. 'E grinned like a tom-ape. I ses to 'im again:

"'You bloody little forrin worm,' I ses, 'I'll dam well see you damned first. You just 'andle a straw of my fodder, and by the mighty Gawd——'

"'E up and looked me straight in the face. 'E didn't grin then.

"'I advise you to do nothing rash, Mr Folkard,' 'e ses. 'Remember this is war. An' besides, you'll get compensation'—'e 'anded me a little slip of paper. An' the

blarsted soldiers came an' took every stick and straw I 'ad. Cows, bullocks, pigs, sheep-fodder. Every blarsted hounce. An' they came an' slept in my barns—an' I came away. There were too many soldiers there—forreners—an' I 'adn't any food. . . . I came away."

He stopped talking like a clock run down. The crowd signalized its complete approval and assent in a volley of silent nods. Now that he had put his case, which was also the case of every one of them, so completely, there was no great desire to speak. They all agreed with hearty accord. A cottager said :

" They came and sed that ten horse sodgers wuz to lodge in my 'ouse, and me with wimmin about—'orse sodgers ! No place for wimmin."

" Hi 'ad the clearance of my morgage in my barns," snarled a man. " An' it's gone. They've got the lot. Them swine. The clearance of my morgage, and I've been twenty years nigger-working to get it—God's awful curse on them ugly swine—they give me a paper——" He laughed like a madman in his contempt of indemnity papers.

A woman said in a thick voice :

" I don't know where my man is. He went out two days ago. He didn't come back. Three gentlemen on horses and a lot of soldiers came

to the house yesterday : they said that they wanted all the food and fodder I had for their army, but that I wasn't to be afraid because they would pay me and do me no harm. They didn't know where my man was. They didn't pay me. They only gave me a paper—and a soldier got over the wall in the evening and stole a hen. When I tried to stop him he shook his gun at me. I was afraid. I hadn't my man. I think he must be dead. I ran."

Another said, speaking with curses :

"They've taken my things, too. But you can't live there anyhow——" *There* was back behind ; a thumb indicated it, "It's awful. The stench is awful. There are bodies all about, going crawling and rotten. It's poisonous. You'd get fever if you stayed. The smell is awful. They use the farms and cottages to house the wounded. They're carting the dead about. But they can't cart all. There's bodies all about all sorey and bursting. Ugh ! There's blood and putrefaction and stench everywhere—a feller can't stay there unless he wants to get the fever. . . . My God. I never smelt anything so horrible. Made me retch my heart up."

Apparently this was the most telling and original story that anyone in the crowd could

volunteer, though there was a certain similarity about the other efforts that made for truth. When every member of a crowd is forced to say the same thing it may be depended upon it is because there is nothing else to say. Brun saw the truth of their story easily. In addition, he happened to know. There is no getting away from an obvious fact. It is as definite as an advertisement for gas mantles.

The invaders were all over the country in a swarming and devouring cloud, he knew. They were pressing forward unrelentingly. In the track of their progress all consumable things managed to vanish as though by magical effort. Nothing escaped. A visitation of voracious and extremely business-like locusts appeared to be upon the land.

Before the insatiable maw of armies everything vanished. Food, fodder, cattle, horses, carts, wains, stacks — everything. Every supply had been clearly indicated by expert and careful spying, and everything was requisitioned to satisfy the invading army. Brun understood very well how it was, and he understood why these men ran away from the empty, hungry and pestilential place. The invading army was there and eating food for all it was worth. No food for casual and inutile civilians

while the soldiery was there. When the invading army had gone—what chance had men in a barren, foodless, famine-stricken place. With other starving people on the prowl for food. Deserting soldiery running loose, snatching what they must by force. Pestilence begot of the putrefaction of carnage setting in. What chances had men—who had women with them . . . ?

Rafael Brun turned about. He opened a gate and strode up a red-brick path. When he got to the door he put his head in and called out very loudly :

“ Agnes. Mother.”

Brun had women with him also.

To the two women, who started forward quickly out of a door, he said :

“ Get together what things you want for a stay in the town. While you are getting your things I will go round to the stable and get the trap. You might make up a bundle of my things, mother, and—please hurry.”

The woman he addressed as mother gave a short sob and came forward a step. She looked yearningly into the man's face as if she expected to see some willingness to give sympathy there. She looked into it a second or two. Finding it unresponsive, she turned and

scurried to the stairs with nervous, slightly shuffling steps.

She was a strong, compact, slightly vulgar yet slightly genteel woman. An indefinite person, hovering between many classes. She would have figured as badly and as fitly in any. She looked wiry, and her cheeks were fresh and firm. She looked hard and a lover of hard work. As she moved up the stairs there was a little petulant attitude about her pose. She was thinking that when there is a woman in the case the mother can go to the devil for all the son cares. She would have been intensely glad if Rafael had called out: "Mother. Agnes."

The girl did not seek any expression of mind from the man at all. She looked at him with a level, clear-eyed gaze which was not one demanding an explanation, but one seeking out some means by which she could help. Her glance said many tender things, but constant experience had made her unconscious of this. She was not a tall girl, but her slimness made her look taller than she really was. She was very slim. Her limbs were slender, her body was small finished, and her ankles, feet and wrists and hands were tiny, though exquisite. She had little billowing, gentle breasts. Her lips were sweetly lined, but fastidiously so.

She had a thin, very white throat, and it looked soft. Her skin, altogether, was pale with a milky smoothness, though in the cheeks there was a suggestion not of red, but of some darker glowing and more electric vitality beneath. Her lips were very red. They looked alluring in their intensity in the neighbouring pallor. Her chin lifted a little, always, in a tiny, pleasant mannerism. Her nose was small, finely marked, straight. Her eyes were intense and extremely deep and blue. She had a clear, broad forehead, and her hair was banded smoothly away from it in a fitting and just manner.

This woman was Rafael Brun's fiancée, Agnes.

CHAPTER XIII

FLIGHT

RAFAEL BRUN drove the light trap; not along the roads, but slantingly across continuous arrangements of suave-bosomed fields. To follow the packed roads was to lose time, and Brun had not been born and bred in this district for nothing. He blessed that series of small juvenile poaching adventures which had given him this illicit but decidedly useful knowledge. Along the roads the panic of fugitive villagers clutted and oozed. The shrill clatter of their agitated voices came to the trap at those intervals when its course came near the rout.

But no more hint of their intimidation than that. Occasionally, though, observant geniuses broke through hedges and got hopelessly lost in their endeavour to follow the rapid and assured movements of the vehicle.

By him in the vehicle the two women sat still and mute. Something dreary had come upon them, and crushed out animation. Their

sole curiosity was the flinching glances they threw at new vistas that came into the line of flight. They looked with slanting vigilance at these wide-flung views, and in their eyes was the fearful expectation of brisk military murder. They were certain in their hearts that the trap moved across the naked sides of hills with the prodigal advertisement of a mammoth pantech-nicon. It remained a mystery to them why enterprising gunners did not write their names in shell fire upon their fabric. Their souls were cringing under momentary expectation of blasting death. Womenlike, they outwardly exhibited the austere and frigid dispassion of ladies about to visit a distant but not extremely popular marital connexion. Brun, looking at their faces occasionally, was kept guessing whether they were displeased with him for dragging them—without palpable necessity—from their comforts, or whether they were bored with the whole proceeding, though good enough to put up with it. He guessed a good many possible emotions, but, looking at their faces, he never guessed their terror.

Being feminine, they posed intuitively, to screen this sensation, for the sake of his nerves, in this trying circumstance. Being a man, he mentally accused the whole sex of hard and

diamond-like callousness. He drove on with sensations of superiority, contempt, condescension and protectiveness playing with light fingers upon his heart.

The county town had been sited by the genius of the earliest Latin military engineers in a position of such excellent strategy that even the twentieth-century soldier was annoyed to find himself unable to improve upon it. It sat at the head of several confluent valley roads and across the railways, browbeating them all. A series of hills ramparted it. They were the sort of hills that cause the observer to fancy that, possibly, the Creator of the universe was after all merely a military engineer ; these hills were so trite and well aligned for practical defence. The town crouched in the heart of them ; a wolflike spider who was ready any moment to dash from its lair to spring to any point of defence.

Brun turned a trifle from his path, and, with cunning, drove round a hill and entered the town from the side. He felt the elation of one doing clever things in tactics. It was as much as he could do to refrain from explaining to his womenfolk that only a person with brains could grasp the fact that the roads into, and the roads out of, this town would be

made impassable by fugitives. He drove the trap along an old and grass-grown cart-track. He knew this would suddenly become a street.

As they scurried down this track which wormed between the hills they met with interruptions which showed that war was being placed upon a firm basis here.

A black-cut figure came out upon a hill suddenly and looked at them. He waved in angular, staccato manner, using his hands like the animation of a figure painted on Egyptian papyrus. He waved two or three of these jerky nuances, and when they turned the base of the hill there were many soldiers waiting for them, standing, gazing curiously, across their path. The officer, without moving from his vantage of tree-branches, glared down upon them with analytical eyes. His eyes were coldly appraising, like a cattle buyer valuing stock.

He looked a level half minute, then he lifted and dropped his chin.

"All right," he said to the soldiers. They stood back mechanically. He spoke to Brun.

"Going into the town?"

"Yes," said Brun.

"To stay?"

"Possibly. Until I'm there I don't know." Brun was chafed by the tone. He was a free man.

The officer was laconically imperturbable.

"Don't stay," he said; "I advise you. No place for civilians. The last place for women. Get out of it." He nodded his head with finality. "Not at all the place for women. They'll be a jiggering nuisance, too," he ended, almost to himself.

Brun drove on down the track, full of disgust at the arrogant display of the unintelligent military mind.

They passed squads of infantry upon the hills, turning up the earth with the fury and vigour of anxious moles. The men stiffened their backs to look down upon them. Sometimes they called out, always they had the air of the divine watching the curious human going his way. They were not above playful and suggestive verbal humours centring upon Brun's possession of two women. There were officers handicapped with many snapping papers, who stood over these men and urged them to perform molelike excesses. Others had solemn duties to perform with stretched tapes and strings, striped and painted sticks and rakish theodolites. All these turned and re-

garded the passing trap, with long stares of calm inquiry.

At one part of the track they had to turn aside while a creaking and rumbling train of squat guns groaned by. The men on the horses struck their mounts continually and swore a good deal. Others went to the wheels of the guns and endeavoured to twist them faster by the exertion of some superhuman effort. But the snub-nosed howitzers rolled on with the unhurried leisure of great forces. The wagging of their hooded muzzles seemed to be the wise shaking of knowing and tried heads at the irrestrainable hurry of youth. A young officer with these guns looked across them very keenly at the trap. He seemed plunged in amazement at the sight of Agnes. He was still looking back at her when the trap passed round a hedge out of sight.

The little track came out from between the hedges in an unexpected manner into the heart of the noise. It was as though it had sprung, for its own amusement, a surprise upon them. They were in a feverish and jerking vortex of roaring bustle without an appreciable break from the vacant silence of the country-side. It was as dazing as the sudden flashing of light in one's eyes. They had arrived in the town.

CHAPTER XIV

SIEGE

THE town was full and spilling over with the terrorized populace of the surrounding county. Their numbers had become too many for the houses and had flowed out into the street. Extempore and *al fresco* camps lined the side gutters in a messy series of unclean, blanket wigwams. Here was an ambitious affair of clothes-props and cording. Next the meanest erectment of tarpaulin and sticks. Those people without the gipsy instinct merely sat amid their domestic rubbish.

Listless and engrained troglodyte entities lolled half out of cellar-flaps and discussed war news, obstetrics and their own astonishing sorrows, with an uninspired, flat relish. The miasma arising from an incomplete sanitation and a conglomerated humanity came out of these cellars with a lethal breath. It joined its pestilential coils to the reek of the greasy smoke from the many little fires in the gutters, the stench of soggy refuse scattered

over the streets. There was a fog of sourish and diseased smell about in the town already.

The centre of the town, the square, was full of men who moved about quickly and shouted savagely, and women who stood with a pathetic helplessness over their bundles.

These women folded their hands before them and gazed about or at the ground, with a mute, negative and sheepish lack of curiosity. Some of them were crying, but not many. They had either arrived beyond that state or had yet to come to it. They turned their heads, not infrequently, and shrieked mechanical and terrible admonitory threats at the incredible arrays of children about their skirts. They addressed their offspring in this manner, less because they were doing wrong than that they might presently be doing wrong. The children listened to these clockwork threats with apathy and continued to eat their thumbs.

When the husbands of these women came back, wearing the air of those who had the faith but had also had to move unobliging mountains, and told them that they could not get even the fractional part of a room, they were treated as false prophets. Squalls of screeching doubt broke round their heads and continued as they went, dragging the domestic

salvage away to join the drab array of wigwams in the side streets. The children cast regretful glances behind them at the bustle of the square. They also managed to get lost with the cheerful genius of the juvenile.

Agnes bent to Brun as he drove the trap gingerly through the people. Her soft face was drawn and there was a perceptible shuddering on her lips. She said :

“Rafael, it is too awful. It’s ugly. These poor, poor people.”

“It’s hell,” answered Brun grimly. “It’s war.”

The girl put her hand to her side.

“It’s hurting me,” she moaned. She pressed her hand into the softness of her breast ; the pain was there. “It ought to be stopped.”

Brun felt confused.

“Ay,” he said. “It ought to be stopped. But you can’t stop it now. The way to stop it is to stop it before it happens. . . . But nobody thought about this side before it happened. It was all armies marching to victory. All soldiers doing brave deeds. Nobody thought of the people who weren’t soldiers getting mixed up with the fighting. Nobody thought of what would happen to non-combatants who got in the way of the armies. And nobody told us. . . .

It was a conspiracy . . . nobody *would* tell the *real* truth."

"Why," demanded Agnes, "why? If we'd only known we'd have moved heaven and earth to prevent this—this horror, happening to anybody. Why?"

Brun turned to her with a bitter smile.

"They were afraid you'd be shocked, my dear," he said.

He flicked his horse with his whip. The tiny jolt forward silenced the girl for a moment.

They turned down a thin street, a back cut, and moved a little freely. A man stepped out of a doorway and put his hand upon the horse's bridle. He stopped the trap with a jerk. He looked at Brun fiercely. He was a smallish man, not over-muscular, but something within him had rendered his face tigerish. He had a great stick in his hand. He leant towards Brun and called out fiercely in a low voice:

"Gimme some money. I want some money. Gimme it."

He raised his stick a little, and with an evil suggestiveness.

Brun steadied the frightened horse with a firm rein.

"Go away," he cried to the man. "You

can't scare me like that. Leave the rein and go away. You'll not get a sou."

Agnes hung over the man with an abrupt and sympathetic eagerness. She seemed to have seen something in the man's face that her lover had missed.

"Why do you want money?" she asked quickly. Her voice was kind.

The man yielded a fraction at the touch of her voice. His intense aggression, however, was but little relaxed. He still held the bridle. His stick was still ready. He turned his eyes from Brun to Agnes.

"Bread," he snarled. "That's wot I want, money for bread. I ain't got no bread. My wife ain't neither. My kids ain't neither. We've been 'ere for a day and a 'alf, and we only 'ad food the first 'arf. We're pretty 'ard put, we are s——"

Brun interrupted him viciously.

"Well, can't you ask for bread?" he demanded. "If you ask for bread in a decent kind of way you'll get it. People aren't devils. You'll get it if you ask for it properly, not——"

The man swamped his arguments with a vast and satiric sneer.

"Harsk for it? Harsk? Harsk for a pint o' diaments, I'll get them sooner, yus.

Harsk——? Why, blimi, I've hofferred to pay for it. I hofferred a tanner. I only gotter tanner. They jumped at it, didn't they? Yus, wif er boot. You jest give——”

“Oh,” said Agnes, her little hands were writhing in her lap. “Oh, it's ugly. Women and little children—and bread so dear.”

“Don't be fooled by the man, dear,” said Brun. “Bread's only threepence a loaf. I know it, anybody knows it. It's utter nonsense——”

“'Tain't threepence,” growled the man. “You dirty gob. It ain't. It ain't to be 'ad for copper. I tell yer I hofferred a tanner—there ain't no bakers left in this bleedin' town. An' no bread. Bread's hup. An' I tells yer I damn well *will* 'ave money.”

A thin arm came stretching over Brun's shoulder. Two, three large silver coins were dropped towards the man.

“You poor soul,” said the tired old voice of Brun's mother. “I wish I had more—get something with that—little babies—oh, you poor, sad soul.”

The trap came out into a curious open triangular space that was formed by the meeting point of three large roads. Brun had a

firm intention of going along one of these roads. There was a place of harbourage to be reached in that way. The horse's head was guided, at least in the spirit, towards that place. A sentry with excessively large feet put up a flat hand.

"'Alt!" he shouted, with much dramatic ability, and he immediately spoilt the effect by adding: "No forofare this way, sir."

Brun endeavoured to be persuasive.

"I only want to go down to the right," he said. "It's very important, and it won't at all cause any trouble."

"No forofare," said the sentry. "Doctor's requisition 'ere." He turned his square back upon the trap with Rhadamanthine finality. His rifle angled from the hollow of his arm so that the bayonet blocked the way with a glittering and purposeful menace.

"If I waited . . . Would it be long?" said Brun, to the unyielding back.

"Dunno," the attitude did not flinch in the slightest. "Shu' think so. Carn't yer see fer yerself?"

The open space was full of the nervous vivacity of hurrying men. Men were pouring into it and going out of it in brisk streams. Men were labouring and arranging in it with zealous alertness. Service wagons were being unloaded

and stores overhauled, and then taken away at once or reloaded into hand-carts. Interminable streams of bedding, pails, bed-frames, tables, sheetings, and amazing collections of utensils were cataracting into the place, undergoing examination, being diverted in set streams to the two large buildings that made one side of the triangle ; the schools and the church.

Over the schools and on the church great white flags swung listlessly, the simple white flag with the blood-red Geneva cross. There were half a thousand replicas in miniature of these flags in the open space. It was everywhere, from the brassard on men's arms, to the huge flapping tilts of the service wagons.

Ten anxious, sweaty men, three in uniform, seven in civilian garb, and all badged with the Geneva cross, stood quietly in the centre of the hustle, lords and nuclei of the riot. They stood very decisively at their just positions; speaking curt sentences and performing curt gestures. Men of certain functions came to each as though attracted by a subtle and cogent magnetism and were repelled by the same peremptory force along fixed and arbitrary channels to an inviolable and pointed end.

Thus beds and bedding came to a soldier,

built of wire and lath, and went flinging to the church or schools. Officially ciphered stores came to a short, square and parched man, who sent them with alarming violence to a large house that once must have been the vicarage. Hand-truck and man-carried loads of chemicals, bottles and flagons and boxes, all still labelled with the labels of those druggists from whom they had been requisitioned, came to a round, tubby man in dirty blue tweed and a bowler hat. Lints and liniments and surgical wrappings and appliances, to a long youth whose trousers were obviously a little too short. Another badged civilian, a loosely strung, jumpy creature, was standing over a series of vats, tanks and cisterns in the attitude of a presiding deity who was also somewhat of a neurasthenic. Amazing quantities of disinfectant, in fluid and powder, were being mixed in these vats and tanks and cisterns. A passive soldier walked from one to another, sluicing water into them from a leaky hose. Mercurial creatures armoured with sprays and pails were eternally dashing up for fresh supplies of this Gargantuan brew, filling their buckets, and dashing away. It looked like a mad game, depending upon its rapidity of movement for success.

When Brun saw this jumpy doctor at the vats, he touched Agnes and said :

"Why, there's Lievertz," and he called :
"Hey, Lievertz ! Lievertz !"

The sentry half turned and spoke with transcendental sneering. "Don't be funny," he scorned. "Can't you see the man's dog-pushed——"

The man, however, wasn't dog-pushed. He looked up as Brun called. He waved his hand in recognition and came striding towards the trap.

"Hello, Mr Brun," he shrilled. "What y' doing here ? Come to help us ?"

"I don't quite know——" Brun began, but the doctor sliced him short.

"Lord, we need help," he jerked on. "My Lord, the work there is to do ! Crr ! God knows how we're going to get through before *they* begin." He looked wildly behind him to see that his subordinates did their duty. "Terrible state of things in the town, you know," he ran on. "Terrible ! Awful ! The people are as careless and as casual as dogs. As pigs. Can't get any decency into 'em. Any thought. B' God, they're animals, helpless animals. They don't foresee, don't realize how fearfully harmful they are, and they don't care either——"

He suddenly took two steps forward. His chest filled. He flung out a stiff arm at a postman who was pouring Condyl's fluid into one of the tanks.

"You utter fool!" he let go, with a great shout. "Go easy with that fluid. Handle it like gold. You jiggery well be careful."

He turned again to Brun.

"Some of these people—the refugees—have been here three days. Pah! And their places—like cesspools. Cesspools! Stench! Abomination! Crr! They don't care, the devils. They just lay about in their own excrement. Unfathomable beasts. We're doing our best, washing, spraying, sluicing. But what can we do amongst them all? What we do is undone two hours after. They're in an awful state. Any amount of 'em down already—we'll have raw running plague here in a jiffy, y' see. A festering putrescence. Then b' Gad, we'll be up to the neck."

He moved a little way, looked at his men and came back again.

"You've seen the town p'r'aps. Deuce of a jumble, ain't it? What you can't see is worse. My God! The water supply has been scuppered by those devils." He meant the invaders. "Thank God we've got some goodish wells.

The people are so many, so dirty, we can't keep 'em sweet. The congestion is awful and everything broken down. Supplies, everything. Awful!"

"You're short of bread, aren't you?" put Brun.

"Bread—wish to God it was only bread. We are short of everything. Meat, bread, vegetables, any food-stuffs. We're short of all necessities. Everything broken down. No laundries working. No baths. No order. The people are all but starving——"

"Yes," said Brun.

"Poor devils," went on the headlong doctor. "They're in a terrible condition. I'm afraid we'll have trouble. They're starving and ill and desperate, y' know. They'll fight like animals for what they must have. They have fought. We've had to shoot six. Poor devils."

"Good God!" said Brun.

"We'll have to segregate 'em into camp and keep a cute watch over them."

"Why not send them away?"

"Wish to God we could," snapped the doctor. "We can't."

"Can't?" jerked Brun. "Why——?"

The doctor looked at him quickly.

"Didn't you know that the enemy have got round behind? We're cut off, you know."

Brun stared at him wide-eyed.

"No," he said. "I didn't know. Are you sure? I came in from the east, but I didn't see any of the enemy. If they were behind, why did they let——?"

The doctor shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, the more mouths in here the better for them," he said dryly.

Agnes burst out in a terrified gasp.

"Do you mean that the enemy are so inhuman that they are driving all these poor people into this town so that—that——?"

"We'll give in more quickly—that is it, Agnes," said Brun.

"Oh," said the girl. "It's horrible!"

"It's war," said the doctor. "No sentiment about war. The business principle in war is that a win must be scored. The quicker and more complete the win the better. This is one of the completest and quickest ways."

CHAPTER XV

SHELLING

R AFAEL BRUN ran along the street sideways like a cat. He sprang to the bomb-proof with a lunging bound that had in it the resemblance of a Rugby player's charge. His body curved forward, shoulders down. Agnes, who stood by the opening, saw him coming. With a little movement, she twisted to give him freer way, but he caught her in his spring, and they rolled into the shelter together. As the door was pulled to, they could hear a bell clanging frantically, and the voice of the nearest sentry blaring out :

“ 'Ware howitzer. West howitzer firing. 'Ware——”

There was a thin, high shrilling in the air. It grew in intensity and detestable piercingness. It stopped. A shattering “crash” jerked and broke the air into a million stunning particles. With it came the sound of a monstrous pile of crockery being dropped, smashing,

upon stone. Giant cracks and clashes and rumblings rose up.

Brun picked himself from the stamped earth of the floor ; he put out a hand to help Agnes rise.

"That's the beginning," he said. "We're going to have it as hot as hot to-day. An artillery officer was telling me it'd be awful hot. They've got new howitzer batteries into line and——" He paused. He remembered that there were certain things the officer said, and several more he carefully, too carefully left unsaid—that were best not told to Agnes or any woman in the town. It was indeed a doctrine all through his career that the full truth was too strong meat for ordinary people. When he had to tell a brutal fact he always, by instinct, told but a particle of it and then softened it down with soothing sentences. He walked towards the door. "Oh, well," he said bitterly. "We should be acclimatized by now." He opened the flap a little and looked out.

Agnes stopped brushing grit from her fore-arms. She looked across at him with a sudden wavering curiosity.

"What did it hit?" she asked. "Another house? It sounded that. Where?"

Brun looked a little farther through the door.

The crack widened to a ribbon of smudgy grey daylight.

"I don't know—oh, it's the estate office farther up. Must have taken it in the side. The roof's like a skeleton against the cloud and the walls are—are just interesting ruins." Agnes came quickly forward. He half turned. "No, dear," he said, with authority. "Don't come nearer. Those devils will be at it again presently."

Agnes stood still and upright. She looked at him out of eyes unnaturally bright. There were stamped circles round the eyes, and her face had a shining pallor. Whether her eyes were dark and polished and bright, or whether her pallor made them appear so, was a matter, one felt, for interesting argument. Her figure, which had become thinner, was trembling. She crushed the fingers of one hand with the fingers of the other.

"There were people in the cellars of the estate office," she said, in a parched voice. "There was a woman and her husband, and there were three children. Two girls, you know, and the cheekiest morsel of a boy, two years old. Would they be——?"

Brun kept his back to her. He looked again.

"Dead, I should say, poor wretches," he

answered. He shut the door decisively. "And I hope they are," he said to himself. The estate office was already burning with sleek, snapping flames. It would take time, possibly, for the fire to get through the ruin into the cellar, but it *would* get there.

The bombardment that was, now, the wearying routine of the day, grew up in slow pacings. The giant, sullen thumps of howitzers picked themselves out one by one. It was like casual workers getting up sleepily and going to labour with infinite reluctance. It was an appreciable time before they settled down to that blended and terrible roaring which showed they were doing their work with the diligent routine of navvies. There were the shrill, whipping cracks of field-batteries also, and the keener ear could pick out the full-blooded thumpings of the heavier field-pieces. The rifle fire always tore and slashed the air with short, frenzied rippings. Rifle fire is the shrill and eccentric orchestration of that elaborate theme of death that the bass of the guns ultimately works out.

The air about the shrinking town came full of shattering detonations and sullen smashing explosions. The pyrotechnic screechings of shells streamed in an elaborate fretwork of

nervous noise overlacing the town. The rumbling earthquake noises of smitten houses spouted up at intervals. The air seemed perpetually to rain slate and rubble and clangorous broken bits. The pavements were euphonic under the consistent shower of smashed and shattered things. Occasionally there bellied up whirling flurries of human voices tuned to the pitch of shrieks. These had the note of sudden panic coming to a throng of factory girls. There was something harsh, annoying and nerve-fraying in these sounds. They were vulgar, hateful and gauche. Sometimes the scream was but the voice of one that rose up in continuous thin, piercing wailings. It was like a body bleeding to death by sound. They could hear the insistent *danse macabre* of men that went by, carrying the moaning wounded. Jets of vocal suffering fluffed into the bomb-proof through unstopped crannies. The shuffle of bearers and the crack and creak of stretchers had a peculiarly distinctive clamour. The maimed were protesting in weary voices. Once a man went by asking in a tired and bitter voice for summary death. "F'r Gawd's sake," he was insisting, "kill me." His voice walked forward to the pace of his bearers with dreary monotony.

This eternal sound of pain, destruction and death seemed to pervade everything like an odour. It was a subtle undercurrent of their very existence.

Brun, presently, went out into the grey lighted day of the town. It was more endurable to watch death than listen to it, sitting quiescent, in soft gloom. Sounds had a spiritual and slightly crawling suggestion in the darkness. They were like the actual ghostly essence of the dead and dying men come to haunt one.

Brun walked down the street and round into another. The week's training in the ethics of bombardment had formed in him an instinct for walls. He strode along under walls with the athletic habit of a cat. He went out of his way to find just and eligible walls. When there were no walls, he rushed open spaces in the huddled manner of those charging infantrymen he had watched so frequently. He always stood by the last bit of wall when these open spaces arrived, and waited with his head cocked a little. When he fancied he gauged a lull in the growl of bombardment, he plunged across the open at this doubled run. When he arrived and looked back, the journey that had seemed several thousand yards was now seen to be a matter of feet.

In the whole town every soul Brun met was going through this fantastical ritual of progression. The whole of its twenty thousand inhabitants solemnly hugged walls and devoutly lunged and ran at open spaces. A novel mission of holy dancers must have imbued this town with a strange fervour.

It was only when a passer was struck that method was noted in the madness. This happened once to a man travelling some distance away from Brun. In the middle of his lunged run this fellow suddenly flung sideways into the gutter. He straightened stiffly as he fell. When he hit the ground he curled up and then shoved his shoulders out, sliding along the ground. He grunted "Uuh!" desperately, and hit the ground hard with his elbows, whilst his fingers clutched and unclenched in the air. Then one hand fell down over his mouth, and he was dead.

Brun stood very quietly for minutes before he could force himself onward, after this. The dreary moaning of the bullets and the vicious swishing of the shell-flights became more in evidence than ever. Something had now made them very palpable. The crashes and clangors of smitten houses were more monstrous than humanly possible.

As he got nearer the town, more and more people were in evidence. They were nearly all going one way; the same way as himself. They were converging into that market-place that made almost the centre of the town. They went there because everybody went there. It was a tacit rendezvous. Here they gathered, saw those friends yet whole and living, and heard vast quantities of incredible and quite impossible truths.

Everywhere, as they went, stood out the advertisements of shelling. Here there would be the blasted core of scoriated ruins that had been a mansion. Gaunt charred timbers stood out of these ruins like blackened bones. Trembling staircases hung threateningly to paralytic walls. There were houses where a neat municipal hand seemed to have sheered walls away for the purpose of a more emphatic inspection. There were pictures hanging with unruffled academic dignity upon the spotless papering of the remaining walls, and in one a piano stood open, and music stood upon the rest. The pianist had just gone into the room for a moment; she would only be——

Upon the crumpled third floor of another house the head, right breast and shoulder of an otherwise nightgowned woman dangled be-

tween the rent plaster and boards. The wind took her decaying right hand and swung it to and fro, to and fro in a monotonous beckoning. Her bright hair danced and jerked in the same breeze. . . .

Over the chaotic rubble mounds of other buildings, intelligent dustmen were spraying generous libations of stinging disinfectant. A thick, foul reek rose above the general sour smell of pestilence that made the atmosphere of the town here. The great shells had struck these buildings before the inmates could escape. It was easier for the pushed garrison to disinfect than to excavate for chance corpses. There were huge swarms of flies.

At the ends of some of the open spaces that Brun passed, many people were collected in huddled masses; about these people armed sentries were placed. They were concentration camps.

Into these camps had been collected all the helpless and useless wasters who sapped the life and the health and the strength of the beleaguered city. They had been rounded up from the holes in which they lived, rioting in filth and pestilence, and forced to conform sanitarily. Ugly and foul diseases ran with free impulses through these people. The

miasma of uncleanness and loathsomeness welled up from these packed places in ugly infection. They were germinal forcing frames of enteric and much foulness. The harried medical men strode through these disease spots every day and kicked the inhabitants out of their squat tents and impromptu huts into the frankincense of the daylight. . . . And the curious point was, that once—a week back—these pitiful creatures had been decent, cleanly minded countrymen, labourers, small-holders, petty farmers.

Some huge demoralizing force had reverted them to the animal. They had to be watched and flogged to cleanliness as one watches and flogs untrained dogs.

Stray shells occasionally flopped into these camps and made indescribable wounds.

There were times, growing more frequent, when passage to the rendezvous place was barred by the uproar of a scuffle. From a side alley would come the snap of quick shouting and on top of it the "cra-ack" of a rifle. At once a turmoil of rioting would boil over. Shouts and firing and shrill cutting shrieks would ring out. The growling roar of men angry with men. Clattering soldiery would spring magically into being and fling at the core

of uproar. Rattling horsemen would bunch and crash over the cobbles. The turmoil of the side street would scream with rage. Then it would stop. Out of the alley would pour a ragged stream of soldiery dragging a man, or men, of sullen and bloody aspect to the officer who would be able to tell them the precise hour they would be shot for pillage, or lawlessness or assault. For these things men were always shot. It was the only way to put down the weed of brutal lawlessness that seemed to riot and run wild under the strain of the bombardment.

Sometimes the sullen-faced men could not be dragged, only carried. At other times there were no sullen-faced men, only corpses for the burying parties. Sometimes to the crowd was added the excitable and jerky figure of the victim, speaking hysterically through the veiling of his own blood, of all the wrong that had happened to him, and why.

At one part of the town the wrecked houses multiplied. Shells fell here in sudden flashing bursts, like summer rain. They fell beating down in mad torrents, and the roar of their bursting was as an incredible gale of sound. The air was full and overfull of shattering crashes. The whole place spouted shell

splinters and violently spurned earth and the flying fragments of demolished houses. The air sang and hummed with gravel and iron and scored-up slate. Showers of wooden splinters flickered and stabbed viperishly. Men were blown to ribbons. They were stripped of all flesh and skin and limbs. Humanity was mutilated and rent beyond recognition. Mangled and lacerated bodies strewed the place. Walls and side walks were littered and splashed with discoloured and fragmentary human flesh. In this danger zone it was impossible to do more than dash headlong. Burying the dead was an impossible task, fit only for Sisyphus. The dead lay in sullen corruption. They streamed eloquent and disgusting exhalation to heaven.

The trenches all round the town were almost as bad as this. The men huddled in them, and the enemy shot at them with high-power shell and spitting shrapnel. When the defenders answered with their guns and howitzers from one particular spot, all the hate of the besieging artillery swung in awful concentration upon those batteries. It was as though gods strove to stamp out the defence with heaven-hurled bolts of raging fire. When the infantry showed in the trenches, vomiting death loosed at them

immediately. The trenches were running blood and littered with clogging bodies. The Medical Corps could not cope with the hot-foot pace of the slaying. The wounded they could snatch they rushed off to the packed and humid floors of their overstocked temporary hospitals, where swift and ugly operations took place before all eyes and the screams of the unanæstheticized patients assaulted all ears. There are no kid-glove habits about the medical practice of war. Besides, anæsthetics had given out. Those wounded that were not snatched up by the bearers died horribly, in the trenches, of gangrenous wounds. When they found opportunity, their tired comrades flung their bodies out over the rifle sangars, so that they rolled a little down the glacis. In this way the town was encircled not only by the enemy but by the dead.

As Brun walked through the town he thought of the doctor, his friend, and the packed and overworked hospitals. It suddenly came to him that he might do good work in these hospitals; they must want men. He walked to the chapel that was a hospital under his friend's supervision. He was not at all angry with himself for not thinking of thus aiding the defence before. He had drifted into the

habit of not thinking of things. Now he suddenly thought he would go and offer his help. He guessed Lievertz would take him.

Lievertz was drawing together the remains of an amputated leg when Brun arrived. The soldier on the table was groaning a little and he would have writhed but two strong assistants held him firmly. Lievertz looked up, gave a snappy nod and went on with his work. When he had finished he came over to Brun with slow steps. He was wiping his forehead with the back of a red hand and his expression was that of a man right up against "the limit." He started on running speech at once.

"B' God!" he said. "B' God! It's pretty thick, eh? Pretty dam thick. Here am I up to the neck. This little preaching booth's scheduled to hold seventy—seventy! I've got a hundred and seventy. God knows how they can live in the place, I don't. I don't really. It's dam thick. Here am I without a thimbleful of anæsthetic. Without half the instruments. Without medicine enough, or food enough, or accommodation or nurses. How the hell I'll get through, Gord knows——"

Brun said smoothly, trying to put the best face on things:

"Oh, well—oh, well, you're doing pretty good. And—and can I help you?"

The surgeon looked at him as one valuing a horse.

"'Fraid not," he jerked.

"I'd like to help you," persisted Brun. "In fact, I came up here to offer myself. I really would like to help."

"I mean you're too late."

Brun smiled the deprecating smile of the well-intentioned.

"Oh, well," he said. "Better late than never, y' know. Better late——"

"I mean," said the surgeon. "You're a bit late, becos it's about all over now, y' know."

"Oh, I don't know," urged Brun.

"I mean it's all over. This, y' know. The siege. It's ended."

Brun's eyes widened. Tremendous amazement swelled his being.

"Good Lord!" he said. "Whoever told you that?"

The surgeon waved a sketchy hand. His tone was a little bitter.

"Oh, orders, y' know. Official. Fact. We can't hold on any longer. We capitulate this afternoon. Fact. 'Sure you.'"

"By God!" said Brun. They turned on

impulse and looked out over the stricken city. The city with all its revolting death and wounds. Its shattered, scorched houses. Its numberless ruins and scars. All the homeless, the dead, the destroyed, the maimed, seemed to raise up protesting voices. Brun's voice was harsh and bitter as he turned to Lievertz.

"After all this," he said.

"Yes," answered the doctor stoutly. "After all this."

"All this slashing and maiming, these outrages upon humanity. This destruction and mutilation: all. All goes for nothing. It's ghastly——"

"Yes," said the doctor. "It's not nice. But kismet. Can't be helped. We did our best. We couldn't hold on. We did what——"

"Pah," cried Brun. "Thank God we couldn't hold on. Thank God we couldn't go on adding to our slashed and slaughtered hundreds."

The doctor looked at him narrowly.

"Umph," he said.

"Would to God we hadn't held on at all. Would to God we'd given in at once, then this senseless, massacring——"

The doctor made a wry face. His fingers felt his chin thoughtfully.

"Yes, that's all right," he said. "It's pretty ghastly here. Still—still if we could have held on it would have been the best. I think it would have been the best."

"Huh," snapped Brun. "The best. This senseless slaying of people, the best. How in hell's name the best?"

"Well, you see," put the doctor, "if we'd held on, we'd have confined it to here, to this town. We could have saved some other town perhaps. The enemy couldn't well go on, leaving a big place like this untaken. Now we give in they go on—go on."

CHAPTER XVI
IN THE TRACK OF ARMIES

R AFAEL BRUN, Agnes and his mother walked through a country as desolate as death. It had a barren and dismal aspect. It was as lonely as the tomb. Its villages were voiceless and horribly mute from depopulation. As they went through them Brun thought of a man he had once seen whose two eyes had been torn out. The face was grey, sullen, blank ; also utterly devoid of vivacity and soul. The vital spark had been torn out of it with the eyes. So were these villages. The vital spark had vanished. The shuffle of their marching echoed through the empty streets like foot-steps in an empty house.

These villages were ghastly to look at. Some of them had encountered the Juggernaut of war. All homely significance had been shattered out of them. They were pariahs broken and destroyed. Gaunt walls stood like naked bodies above thick muddy mounds of ashes. Roof rafters gaped like skeletons' ribs

through ruined thatch and tiling. The roads were messy with the mucky debris of flight, of battle and of burning. Split walls had flung their rubble across the pavements. Draggled verdure trailed about like the skirts of a vice-sodden woman. Filth, corruption, desolation was engrained about the place. All inhabitants had fled. Plague could not have dismayed them more completely. The empty sockets of their homes glared in sightless desolation to heaven.

Sometimes these villages were unsightly with the decadence of death. Unburied bodies festered in the wounds of the houses. They were so offensive that Brun was forced to take his party by wide detours round these places. He could always tell them from others by the squabbling voices of crows among the shattered houses. He had gone determinedly through one of these charnel-houses on one occasion, anxious not to lose time. The way the crows had risen in a squawking crowd had made him sick. He had seen flies flash up from a joint of rotting meat in just that way. It had, however, not been quite as bad as the sight of reluctant dogs who had moved sullenly off, licking their lips.

All the country in this part was as desolate as the houses. Ricks had vanished. Barns

had been torn open and spoiled of their stocks. All standing stuff had been swept clear, or if it had not been swept clear it had run riot and to seed in a manner that was still more dismal. There was a stultifying air of neglect and decay over all the fields. It encompassed them in a sordid mist of doom. Farming machines stood horribly inert in the fields, with rusty and hang-dog mien. Or were turned over and were falling to pieces in the general state of destruction. The fields were without men, and were returning at a frightful pace to their natural and primitive wildness.

They met a few people ; not many. They would they had met less. The people were awful. They were drooping and shattered and inert like the villages and the fields. They were hopeless. They moved without impulse or spirit. They were ghosts in a world of wraiths. Sometimes they asked for food. More often, and more terrible, they did not care. They sat by the roadside looking at them, looking at them as they went by. Their eyes were full of the mute, un-understanding hopelessness of stricken beasts.

An old woman sat amid the ruins of a cottage looking at them in this way. Her hands rubbed slowly on her knees. Her lips moved

in an everlasting, soundless mumble. She was so thin that her clothes hung about her like sacks. But she said nothing. She only looked. Perhaps she had learnt the inutility of saying anything. She was only one of many in the same state. When Agnes gave her a loaf of bread, she fingered it in her lap. It was some strange and unique jewel to her. But she did not attempt to eat it. She seemed as if she had forgotten how to eat; she had starved beyond that point. She put her hands back on her knees and began to rub again. When they looked back at her she had not changed her attitude. She was still rubbing and looking, looking at them.

Once they came upon a group of people, a man, woman and two children at a meal. Their meal was of nothing more than dirty mangels, but the man got up directly he saw Brun, and stood to bar them from the pitiful feast. He was a man dressed with some decency in good clothes. Even, he had a gold watch-chain across his shrunk waistcoat. Brun understood the action. He said at once:

“I’ve got some bread and tea. Can we join you?”

The man glared suspiciously. Then he laughed, a hoarse, desperate laugh.

"We have to be careful these days," he said. He took their tea and bread. He did not thank them.

"I come from over there," he told Brun presently, swinging his arm to give the direction. "I was a farmer once."

"So," answered Brun, "but the fighting didn't go that way. How did they get you?"

The man laughed again. It was the laugh of the wolf. Full of hate, devoid of mirth.

"The fighting didn't go that way; but *they* came right in on me and swept me clean, clean. . . . They gave me these instead." He held out a number of indemnity slips. Brun looked at them. They were worth a considerable sum.

"That's a lot of money," he told the farmer.

"I don't eat paper," the farmer told him. He fell back on his mangel and bread with a grunt. Presently he said: "I'm not the only one. They're all starving. The whole country-side's starving. If the fighting didn't come along and ruin 'em, then *They* came along and ruined 'em. Ho, they gave 'em bits of paper—there's half a million in bits of paper about the country-side—but there ain't a hundred loaves. What's the good of paper—of money; if there

ain't any loaves? And they didn't ill-treat me or mine. They was as nice as nice. They just took everything. They was polite—but hell, what's the good of politeness? It didn't fill the belly of my wife and my kids."

Brun was puzzled.

"But—but can't anything be done? Isn't anybody doing anything? People can't just starve—and starve like this."

Again the farmer laughed.

"Ho, they're trying to do something. A man, a man belonging to a Fund—a Fund," he guffawed bitterly—"came round a few days back. He had a lot of money with him, he had a lot of cast-off clothes. He had a good heart. He was hurt when we wouldn't have his clothes, wouldn't have his money. 'Food,' we said to him. 'Food, that's what we want. Just Food.' He was very troubled. He went away. He came back in a day with a cartload of loaves. There was nigh five hundred loaves on that cart. There was quite two thousand people waiting to eat 'em. The man from the Fund nearly cried. He had moved heaven and earth but he hadn't been able to get any more. He nearly cried. There ain't no food in the place. The armies have taken it all. They've *got* to live. We don't count. We're just accidents.

The armies are the things that count." He looked about him drearily. "And to think I didn't even know or care a damn whether there was going to be a war or not fifteen days ago."

CHAPTER XVII

GUERRILLA FIGHTING

A THIN block of tiny men went toiling upon an interminable film of road.

They bunched together in a dreary, high-shouldered manner; a few men, a wagon, a horseman and a few more men, two wagons with huge loads and men walking by them, then a little gap with a few casual strollers walking loosely and without order in between, then two more wagons. Behind this last a little knot of ordered men. A horseman rode backward and forward with fussy purposelessness.

He shuttled to the front, stopped his nosing horse, waved a hand. Then he rode to the rear. The teams, six horses to the carts, looked very long and very curiously built triangles from the height. They strained at the rise in a slow, stamping way. The high sun caused them to cast shadows which made them appear out of focus.

To Brun they appeared as a neat organization of blots dropped by an implike schoolboy upon

the tempting purity of the interminable white road. Somnolent woody bangings and leather cheepings came to him slowly. The sound had infinite, hot distance.

From Brun's feet the giant valley fell in a great soaring sweep. It fell miles and then it touched the road. From the road it rose again. It employed the same titanic line. It swooped up in a breathless curve that might have been slashed out by the sickle of Gargantua. It arrived at an immense crest. There was a vacancy of ten miles between summit and summit.

In the cup, at the bottom, the road advanced. It appeared insignificant and perceptibly diffident. The mighty immensities of the place made it cringe. It was an intrusion in this vast, nude space, and it led the pollution of sound into what was obviously designed to be the immeasurable temple of stillness. The stupendous flanks of these swelling hills stared to the hard enamel of the sky with the eternal and unwinking dumbness of immemorable sphinxes. There were crowds of tiny ballooning gorse-bushes everywhere.

The war had gone forward and it had left the land naked. The three army corps had pushed and pushed the circle of invasion

farther and farther. The ripples had spread until they were enormous. And as they had spread so they had pressed turmoil before them. With vigorous steel brooms they were sweeping the indescribable uproar and confusion and deadly clamour of war away to the heart of the country.

Within the perimeter of their advance they left a garnished space, swept bare of strife by the bristles of war.

When the County Town had fallen, Brun had abruptly taken wisdom. He ignored the universal decision to fly before the invaders. He stayed behind. He had a biting vision of a harried multitude clogging each road that led to the Capital in ganglions of frenzy. Each converging road would add to that frantic riot; each town, each village and each block of cottages. Each road would be a mad runnel of inextricable chaos. An ugly, stamping death lay all along those roads. He had a biting vision of the goal of these roads: the Capital. The Capital would be the ugly, famished pestilence of the County Town magnified enormously. It would be an enlarged Paris. It would suffer as the corpulent. He decided that the greater evil lay in flight.

He remained behind.

Inflexibly he had routed the terror of his mother, the unreasoning desire of his fiancée to go. He had remained in the town and the flood of invasion had swept, ignoring their insignificance, over them, driving the fugitive sheep in huddled masses before it.

Brun had come out of the town into the country. There was a village which he knew, and he guessed it would do for shelter. It possessed the distinguished virtues of remoteness, unattraction and superlative insignificance. It had never borne a genius, or a minor poet ; it had spent a life of seven hundred years in cheerful inanity and successful unnotoriety ; it had never possessed a murder of its own, or figured in a morning paper. There were thirteen houses, four inns and a twice-a-month church in it. It rested in a wrinkle of these hills, upon one of which Brun now stood. The hills looked after it with kindness and shoo'd off intruders. It was that type of village which one comes upon by sheer accident.

Rafael Brun and his party had been here days. It was quite as admirable as he had designed it to be. The war went on. They heard no subterranean rumblings of the war. Paradise could not have been more remote, Lethe more drowsy. The village had gone to

sleep in the year 1215. It had yet to wake up. The sun always came to it as a man saddled with a fixed habit. The grocer, a person of unshaken optimism, had stocked his composite shop for six months. It had been the ingrained habit of generations to stock the grocer's shop for six months. There had been a time when an invoice had miscarried, and one of his customers had suffered the lack of flour. Therefore, there was plenty to eat.

Here, Brun debated, was a place untouched by war. War went on all about ; battles raged redly. The nation was crushed and shattered into dust. Principalities and powers fell stunningly. Yet the village was placid, calm. It proceeded along its fixed course with a serene tranquillity. Naught but the superhuman could alter that tranquillity. Nations might fall and nations might rise over them, tranquillity would ever be the village's birthright.

He was thinking that now as he stood on the lip of the hill and looked through space down upon the collected lilliputians struggling in leaden-footed manner along the interminable road. The soft, woody rattling came faintly to his ears. He heard the cheeping of harness. He smiled with large beneficence. The world was a fit place. Here was an exquisite analogy.

War crawling meanly before him ; behind him, the Olympian unconcern of Arcadian peace.

A rifle shot jumped, spitting, from the hill-side below him.

The hill-side at once lived with innumerable tiny flickerings of slashing jets of flame. All the bushes upon the slope became venomous. Squirting fire tongued in diamond-like glitterings from the soft green heart of each. The thin blue filming of cordite vapour rose in wavering, scarcely palpable gauzing over the flame jets. The great valley was abruptly brimming over with infernal "cra-acking" and snapping of rifle shooting. A giant hand was running rapidly over the keyboard of a monstrous piano. But each note as it was struck proved merely to be a whip-lash of sound. The noise waved to and fro over the rifles, in wide, crackling surges. There was an impish activity in the noise of firing.

Upon the road a man was down. He lay in an odd, spread-eagled patch, and from this distance he looked like a stain upon the surface of the metal. There was another pulling himself in a strained, broken-backed manner to the grass ; he had the appearance of an insect which had been partially crushed, but not enough to stay the working of the front limbs.

GUERRILLA FIGHTING 185

The man's stiff legs followed, trailing at an eccentric angle; they had an air of desiring, although under compulsion, no acquaintance with their more energetic connexions.

The advance along the road had ceased. The first wagon had slewed across the breadth of it, blocking it completely. It jerked in hiccupy spasms as its horses tugged and bucked at the traces. One of the horses was upon its side and lashing with its feet in an uncontrollable fury of mortal agony; as a more vigorous effort shifted its position it left horrid smears of dark texture upon the metalled surface. The final wagon had rolled forward on to its horses until all floundered in hopeless confusion. The two leaders had been shot, but the others remained indubitably active. The convoy, however, was surely trapped. Both in front and behind, sprawled wagons and teams blocked the road.

The fighting whirled about in a gusty flurry. The men of the escort were about the edge of the road, under the meagre bank; they were prone, and firing upward. Their rifles smashed out a splendid defiance. There were men under the wagons and men in them, and upon them. They all lay tensely, firing upward at the venomous spitting bushes. They looked

singularly unexcited in the hard sunlight. They gave one the impression that all this bother was of no importance. Their hands writhed behind in accustomed search for cartridge clips. The hiss and squirt of the pieces was calculated and level. It was all routine work, done at a fixed wage and without burning enthusiasm. It was only when a man tumbled from a wagon and upon his doubled neck and side in a mad contortion, and another slid stiffly a few inches, his boots scraping little heaps of dust, from the bank, and lay still, that you realized the profundity of the business. A horse still moved jerkily backward and forward. It went jogging to the front, stopped, then turned and went aimlessly in a dribble to the rear. The man upon its back had no commands to give; his hand still waved but it waved to the ground, the man hung like an uncouth, half-filled sack across the neck of the beast.

The shooting upon the hill-side boiled up to a screaming note. It became a fever of firing. The men who had hidden in the bushes discovered themselves in dashing runs. They came out scuttling like disturbed rabbits in ones and twos and threes. They sprang forward nimbly to the next bush, dragging their

rifles. The hill-side was alive with these hasty importunates, darting and springing and firing down upon the ham-strung convoy. Brun's startled eyes goggled at them in amazement.

They squirmed and postured amazingly. They demeaned themselves in any way to win a pace forward. They used cover with the genius of worms. Their writhing slyness was nauseating. Folds in the pepper-coloured ground, bushes, mounds, rain-water gullies were all vehicles to their goal. They slithered, crawled, fumbled and crouched forward. They were weird anthropoid beings quite as accustomed to all fours as to the glorious use of two upright legs. They looked like so many monkeys lumbering through the grass, their cunning was so infinite. The onlooker was fascinated.

Their forward progress was inexorable, yet it did not interfere with the steady uproar of their rifle fire. They still plied their smashing guns with a business habit. They looked like a vitalization of an old and a popular legend. The legend of the burgher attack in the Anglo-Boer war. They looked like so many vindictive and purposeful doppers rushing a convoy. They seemed eminently capable of shooting a

fair and generous proportion of accommodating enemy in the greatest comfort to themselves.

Brun glared at them as they raised themselves, ran forward, fell prone and fired.

"By the warm God," he cried, "civilians."

Others got up, ran forward, fell down and fired. They wore the tweed trousers and the lounge coat of the ordinary civilian, where they did not wear the corduroy pants and the flannel shirt of the labouring civilian. They were obviously of that class known as non-combatants, though they combated furiously and effectively.

"Guerrillas," mouthed Brun. "Guerrillas, by God. Franc-tireurs." He looked at them open-mouthed. "By God!" he gasped.

They were led by a military man. He noticed that vaguely as they rushed. He had noticed, vaguely, a nondescript, nervous creature in faded khaki. An officer—or sergeant, or private, it mattered little—left behind by the wave of the invasion. But being led and organized by a military man did not give them military status. There were guerrillas, franc-tireurs, non-combatant guerrillas. A black outlook.

The attack was concentrating upon the convoy with steady, sure rushes. There was a

deliberate and concentrative decision about the business. It was as though at each new sign of weakness the men on the hill-side pressed yet closer. They were like dogs hemming a stricken stag. They worried its life out slowly, certainly, but they carefully refrained from risks. The life of the defence was slowly draining. The retorting rifle spurts became fewer, and those of but nerveless effort. There were more limp forms about on the road than active ones.

Rafael Brun glared at the attacking guerrillas with indignant and dumbfounded gaze. It seemed to him a preposterous wrong that these men should be here, doing as they did. It was unreasonable and it meant a great deal of trouble. It meant uproar, fighting, discomfort, all about these quiet and placid hills. It meant that war had not passed them by ; that these obstinate fellows were bent upon carrying on the fighting here where fighting was apparently done. They had full intention to strike waspish blows, to cut up supplies, to cut off detachments ; to gall and to goad and to prick the invaders in every conceivable way.

He saw the immense annoyance it would be to the invaders. The immense and dangerous rage it would cause. He could have blasted

these fool guerrillas off the face of the earth for not leaving well alone.

Yet he was irritated with himself for not having foreseen this. It was to be expected. People did that. It was in history from Greece to the Transvaal. France had done this ; Spain, America, Cuba. It was a universal habit.

With a smashing burst of firing the guerrillas had crashed down the last earnest effort of defence. The spluttering from the wagons dribbled out. A white cloth jibbed up, a handkerchief upon the barrel of a rifle.

The guerrillas rose from all over the hill, an abrupt rising of many men, like quick springing up of trees. They flooded down upon the convoy.

With incredible despatch they tore the tarpaulin from the wagons and flung out the contents. Men like laden ants began to stagger in long sinuous files up the side of the hill towards Brun. Each sagged and sweated under the load of a weighty Service box.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE VILLAGE THAT HELD GUERRILLAS

THE men who flung up the hill-slope in long, sinuous files stopped abruptly. Under their loads they lifted their chins and sniffed the air with the snappy actions of horses of metal. They tossed heads as the hunted animal does when he winds the presence of his trackers. Their feet shuffled nervously.

From up and down the valley came quick, thin clanging calls of bugles.

The bugles called to each other in eerie, disembodied voices from all over the country-side. They shivered the blanket of quiet with piercing, clear-cut bell-tones. They conveyed a peremptory message with voices of habitual command. Theirs was the timbre of all knowledge; they had very definite ideas of what was to be done. They were as the spoken commands of the indistinguishable god calling down to his leashed legions. Or these were the voices of calculating overmen who had been shrewdly biding time, and who now called to

each other, saying: "Now is the moment. Get to work."

The men upon the slope that swept down from Brun's feet stood in a line of impromptu statues. They stood in pricking attitudes, listening to the bugles calling across the miles; the notes passed from behind hills to behind hills. The message of this disembodied dialogue flitted over them from one end of the valley to the other. The message was: "Now is the moment. Get to work." The men upon the hill-side knew this.

A helio beam flicked into the sky. It picked out messages in eccentric and insane spittings. A frantic lunatic obsessed by Morse cipher worked it. From the other end of the valley another beam leaped to join it. From the farther side of the farther hills another. The three danced and postured in a flickering, senile *danse macabre*.

A stammering rapping of gunnery began away down the road and came up it quickly. The small black forms of outflung guerrilla pickets could be seen running in. A loosely strung line of bobbing corks followed quickly over the sea of brown turf that made the flanks of the valley. Now and then these corks pulled up jerkily, and a vivid come-and-go of

THE GUERRILLAS VILLAGE 193

diamond light glittered high up in each clear-cut silhouette. The quick, double snap of the rifle-shot followed like its reflection, made tangible by sound. This sparkling and snapping went to and fro along the line of corks in rolling surges.

Occasionally a running picket would fall with a sidelong, savage jolt to the earth. His shoulder would hit and plough with so savage a crash that it was evident that his final desire was to make a permanent hole for himself in the universe.

The stiffened guerrillas upon the hill became precipitately mercurial and fluid. Activity whirled them. Men with boxes raced up the hill with redoubled, sweaty fury. They tugged, pulled, hauled, dragged like folk possessed. They were getting their boxes to the summit in a given time and for a bet.

Men flung out from this ascending line, a spray of them, as though a sea had just struck. They ran out with aggressive eagerness to be at the throats of their enemies, and their going was of that kind which suggests the pulling of levers. Some of these men only were in uniform, but all worked with the suave routine of drilled and accustomed soldiers. They rushed to where a series of hummocky

mounds broke the level sweep of the hill-side. They fell behind them. At once the spit of their rifles squirted and squirted with clock-like and wonderful unanimity. The sprinting pickets rushed for these mounds as eager pot-hunters for the tape. They tumbled amongst their comrades and were shooting backward at once.

The line of bobbing corks obliterated themselves with humility and discretion. They sank into the earth. Merely the topaz squirt and pip-pop of their rifles advertised their presence. One great-hearted cork stood up in a moment ; he displayed to the world the fact that he possessed long arms ; he did Punch-and-Judy things with kicking and snapping flags. His office clothed him in omnipotent armour. Nothing could slay this great-hearted cork.

Down the road a sullen worm of men moved forward in answer to the snapping flags. It moved with deliberate and heavy-footed caution. It had an elephantine suggestion of feeling the way on a risky bridge. But it moved definitely. At a certain point a great section broke away like a swarm of disturbed flies. A hundred whirling particles danced over the turf to the aid of the corks. In time they showed themselves to be earnest brother

THE GUERRILLAS VILLAGE 195

corks willing to help. The premier corks, to show their supreme worth, were ever wriggling and worming forward, like many progressive tadpoles, towards the men behind the hummocks.

A sweaty man, who looked like a butcher without his vocation, dropped a box to the turf a yard from Rafael Brun.

"Aw," he gulped, "aw; we get it in the neck this time, sure! Pretty hot time. Aw! Pretty strong force darn there, sure. Pretty strong . . . them helios, too. . . ." He looked at the helios with immense reflective concern. He shouted: "Aw, Gawd. Theer, didn't I say so? Look theer."

He put a finger out. He pointed *up* the valley to the road. There were sullen, heavy masses upon the road, upon the brown of the turf, moving downward with the sluggish impulse of water spilt in dust.

"And look theer," he shouted. His yellow, calloused finger raked the sky-line across the valley. Over the sky-line across the valley rose a line of tiny black objects. They swept down over the valley-side to the road. Another line serrated the sky, and another. They moved down the hill-side quickly, like shadows cast by string.

"Aw," said the man. "We git it in the

neck this time, sure. We done this trick once too often, sure. We're busted. We git it in the neck, sure——"

The guerrillas upon the slope were falling back with a brisk defiance. They retired swiftly, showing their teeth all the while. Their equable shooting beat steadily into the heart of any eager aggression. They were falling back, but they were doing so at the pace they themselves chose. There was a bland aloofness in their behaviour. The attackers raged at them with angry red cries. They shouted shrill threats and imprecations. The guerrillas were unruffled. They knew to a fraction the giant compass of their unpopularity. They did not let it flurry them. Their rifles rent off in long, tearing swishes. But steady swishes.

The commander got them to the top and flung them out in admirable veils of defence.

"Here," he shouted. "This'll do. We'll do here. We can hold 'em here—a bit." His air was of a grocer anxious as to the blessed dressing of his shop window. There was a keen and common-sensed commercialism about his fighting. He fought his men like a joiner sure of his trade. Brun was only conscious of the droning, ripping bullets and blazing thoughts of death. He wondered how it was that the

THE GUERRILLAS VILLAGE 197

officer did not realize that he was risking death one hundred and twenty times to the minute.

The officer was telling a subordinate that he could hold the ridge for ten minutes.

"I can hold for ten minutes!" he bawled, over the firing. "Then I'll fall back, slow. You ought to have the stuff——"

"Do you think they will flank?" said the subordinate. "They might 'ave a try, sir——"

The officer examined ground with cool, plumb-bob glances.

"Not for ten minutes!" he cried. "I'm telling you that. Ten minutes's my minimum—then we fall back, slowly. You should have the stuff in the carts by then—some of it anyhow——"

"Yers," said the man. He had a solemn, police-official manner. He thought for eternities between each pearl of his wisdom. "Yers. The carts should be ready, waiting. I ordered them to be ready in the village jest by——"

"Git," said the officer. "We'll fall back into the village after. Leave us a cart. Thank Moltke they can't get cavalry up to us."

He swung about and began instructing his men in terse, natty sentences.

Rafael Brun, about to go, suddenly flamed

in heart as he heard the directions. He remembered another village that had been caught in the vortex of fighting. That had been legitimate fighting, too, not guerrilla fighting. It was impossible that this officer should retire through the village. It was too ugly and monstrous. He went forward and protested. He said :

“ My dear sir, you can't go through the village.”

The officer looked at him. He was a brisk, tight-skinned man. He looked about any age. His hair was grey, but his eyes were twenty-five. He had the quick movements of an alert sparrow. He was busy with a good many things ; he heard but did not appreciate. Brun shouted again :

“ My dear sir. I say ! You know you can't retire through the village.”

The man looked at him over a shoulder.

“ Oh, can't I ? ” he said.

Brun put out his chin. A determined passion stung him.

“ Do you realize what'll happen to the village if you go through it ? ” he snarled.

The officer faced him squarely.

“ Do you realize what'll happen to two-thirds of my men if I don't ? They'll be

THE GUERRILLAS VILLAGE 199

shot, sir. Shot down like slaughtered hacks, sir. That's what'll happen. They're non-combatants, two-thirds of 'em. And non-combatants——"

"But go some other way. In the village there are——"

"Oh, you go to Hades," said the officer.

"Haven't you a thought for the peaceful villagers?"

The officer was back at his work. He chucked his answer over his shoulder.

"No, by gumes, I haven't," he snapped. "If your peaceful villagers wanted peace they should have seen that they got peace. They didn't take the trouble to see. They've got war. Well, they've got to put up with what they've got. They've got to look out for themselves in the mischief of their own brewing. I'm looking out for my men—who'll be shot as civilians-in-arms as the bloody general against us promises, if they're caught."

"There are women in the village."

The officer turned on him a raging face. He waved a revolver in a furious hand.

"Get out," he roared. "Do your own saving. Don't worry me."

Rafael Brun turned and ran for the village. There was no hope with the military mind and

at least he could do *his* best. He could convey a warning to the inhabitants of the village, get them out before the ghastly business of street fighting began. He ran very quickly, wondering whether he would have time.

He passed one man rushing headlong in the direction of the firing-line. As this man observed him he wagged frenzied hands and shot hot shouts at him over a flying shoulder.

"Skip for all yer know," he shouted. "Skip dam quick . . . they're a-flanking. . . . Skip . . ." he was gone in a cloud of bawled advice.

Presently Brun came upon Agnes standing upon a high road-bank at the entrance to the village, looking out for him. She made quick, nervous movements forward as he came.

"Oh," she gasped. "Oh. Rafael . . ."

Rafael Brun came up to her in his stride. He took her arm and swung her round.

"Hullo, Agnes," he cried, and : "Look here, we have got to get away from this place. There's going to be fighting here, and we've got to get away. Only we must be quick." He hurried her along with his hand tightly gripped upon her arm.

She stopped him and tried to turn him aside, where the road led up over a hill and round behind the village.

THE GUERRILLAS VILLAGE 201

"This way," she said. She hung back.

"This way ; come on."

Brun dragged at her arm.

"The people of the village, you know," he said. "We've got to tell them——"

Agnes waved her free hand in the vehement explanation of the nimble elucidating the obvious to the dull.

"No," she called. "No. No. No. It's all right. There's no need. They know!"

Brun looked keenly at her. He tried to drag truth from her eyes.

"Sure?" he demanded. "Are you sure?"

"Yes, I am," she cried. "Yes, I am. They're all running. They're snatching things and running."

"Are you sure?" he demanded.

"Oh come, do. Yes, yes, I am sure. Nearly all were running when I came away. By now——"

"Nearly all! They must *all* go."

She pulled at his arm.

"Oh, Rafael, do come. Do."

"We've got to tell those people, you know. *All*."

"Do come," she cried. Her throat seemed full of terror and tears. She dragged him to the side path.

"We've got to go——" began Brun.

An appalling shock of rifle firing sounding right upon their backs threw them round. The place became chaotic with running men. Hoarse, thick shouts filled the air.

"Look out," screamed Agnes. With a sharp leverage of her frail strength she jerked him aside and on to the by-path. Brun found himself running.

The air was full of such bitter tumult that, at the top of the rise and in the harbourage of some trees, they were forced to turn about to look.

Below them and startlingly close lay the village, and all the ugly battling that went on in it. The fight roared down the streets like a gale through the confining walls of a cañon. It rocked and whooped in eddyings of black hate. There were raving notes of hideous blood lust in the abominable clamour of it. It made insane and stupendous noise. The air was stunned and shocked with its indescribable and deafening vociferation.

The defending guerrillas fought with horrible sucker-like tenacity from house to house. They made out of each cottage a practicable fortress. They piled furniture and mattresses and utensils into impromptu barricades. From

THE GUERRILLAS VILLAGE 203

these vantages they battled with the viciousness of the cornered. There was no quarter for them. They preferred to die hot-blooded, not demanding it. They had no fancy for the blank wall and the firing squad making stern examples of them. They smashed their trapped defiance with frenzied rifles into the face of the advancing soldiery. Every building raged seething defiance from parlour to attic. Red hate blared and brayed from every window.

The attackers blazed at the cottages with vindictive rage in their hearts. They poured in their fire as people able to pay off an old score at last. They had naught but fury in their minds for these illicit fighters who had slain their comrades down upon the road. They were full of searing malice for these uncertificated soldiers. They looked upon them as bandits, to be exterminated utterly. Their active detestation was horrifying. They mowed and slavered at the obstinate defence, urging each other to expeditious murder.

Their bullets poured into the cottages with a stupendous hail. The sheer beat of the thronging nickel pellets burst cavities into walls, doors, barricades, roofs. Plaster fell flaking in gusty showers. Slates beat and shattered, and holes grew in rafters and joists

as though the fabric dissolved. Windows broke into glittering diamond showers with huge crashes ; frames and sashes danced into splinters as though battered by multitudinous aerial hammers. Doors cracked into ragged fragments, reeled drunkenly upon crazy hinges, fell with vast clatterings. The attackers pumped shot into the village through myriad, inexhaustible hose jets. The defenders pumped back with unabated hate.

The gutters thickened and ran blood. The dirt of the streets clogged and grew viscid with the same deadly reek. Dying men and dead men fouled each other in nervous, writhing jumbles. The streets became charnel. Blood sleeked out from under doors and rilled down the brick steps in fat, brown ooze. Battered carcasses sprawled or were hurled from windows into the runnel of the gutters.

Death became normal ; only life was unique.

When a live man showed for an instant, bullets " phutted " into his body like rain upon wet clothing. They struck and dashed him headlong in one impulsive sweep. They battered him out of human semblance before he could draw two breaths. His groggy debris splashed in fantastic designs over the house walls. A soldier stood for a flashing instant

THE GUERRILLAS VILLAGE 205

clear of a greenhouse ; the stream of bullets his appearance evoked blew his head and left shoulder clean off his body. A frantic fool of a woman appeared at a window waving a white rag ; the bullets smashed her so that she looked but a flat, raw thing even before it was realized she was a woman.

Presently fire came to assist in the inferno of this place. A soldier mad with rage ran with a torch to a tarred scullery. A million bullets seemed to whirl him into rags, but the scullery was alight and the excellent example had been given. Zealous comrades began to emulate. The stubborn defence had enraged them, as well as slain numberless good comrades. Moreover, it was useless to adopt legitimate means for the subjugation of vermin. They were beyond the pale of ordinary methods, these guerrillas. They were outside the ordinary canons of military usage. They were pests. Burn out the pests.

Torches began to appear in many places. Fire sprang up, died, and then sprang aloft again. In a dozen spots conflagration started, and in flickering leaps the tongues of burning spread. The flames expanded and broadened in volume as though they were inspired by the demoniac fury of the fighting. They clasped

long, voracious tentacles about the houses. Their furnace roar swelled up and added to the clamour of battling. Soon the whole village was a throbbing core of flame.

The flames belched upward in giant licking wisps from the pulsing incandescence at their hearts. The roar of the draught was full-throated. It was full of strange crashings and giant cracklings. Walls fell in rumbling sprayings of glittering sparks. Roofs blew out with volcanic explosions. The air was overcharged with the creeping, singing note of calcining particles, full of the splitting of timbers, and the snapping of bricks. The rent screams of agonized men and women and some children came out of the hearts of the burning houses now and then, like cruel knives of sound cutting the air.

All the while the fight roared in the streets like a gale through a cañon, full of the raving notes of hideous blood-lust. It never ceased its insane and stupendous noise. The rage of the fire made no impression on that rage of killing.

CHAPTER XIX

THE GUERRILLAS THEY CAUGHT

A BIG, yellow and fleshy man distinguished by a colonel's crown and stars came picking his way between the resting infantrymen to where three men stood under strong guard. Four other officers, a major, a captain and two lieutenants, hung at his heels like stars dragging in the gravity of a larger planet. One of these officers appeared to have the courage of much speaking. He fired off little clipped sentences at the other three officers. The other officers did not answer him. He did not appear to desire answer. His voice was an excellent companion whom he loved dearly. The other three officers were of the type which has so much work to do that they ask heaven continually with pursed lips and upturned eyes "how the hell they're going to get through it all."

They followed the colonel under visible protest, knowing that the world was going to pieces elsewhere through their absence.

When they arrived at the squalid little group, they paused as men murmuring: "Well, what do we do now?" They let their eyes rest upon the grouped men with cool abstraction, viewing, as it were, with visible ennui a picture over which some ass had found fit to rave. The colonel stood over the captives with the frigid composure of deadly calculation. Through the puffy slits of his eyelids his eyes glittered coldly like those of a snake. His lips were pursed in a little writhe of skilled computation; his face wore the expression seen upon the faces of those suburban women who beguile their journeyings in trams by assessing the sum total of their well-dressed neighbours' clothes. The regard is cold-blooded, detached, vulgar and fishlike; it has the value of every human attribute down to the odd farthing.

Under this ugly scrutiny the men were visibly uneasy. The guard had shuffled and formed mechanically beneath the colonel's cold eyes, but the three prisoners stood still in a sullen lethargy that proclaimed at once the indisputable fact that they were unacquainted with military training.

In spite of their wounds, the blood that covered them, and the evident signs of their recent battling, these men were civilians.

GUERRILLAS THEY CAUGHT 209

The colonel looked at these three men with sharp, hard glances, recognizing their position perfectly. They were non-combatants and they were to be shot. Yet he stood over them calculating out a death that might be more drastic than mere offhand shooting. These men had been caught red-handed in the most pernicious of military crimes : fighting without military licence or authority. They—and all the rest of their kind—had caused great moral and practical harm to communications, irritating and vexing the well-oiled movements of the different armies in a thousand petty ways. They were as troublesome and as annoying as vermin. There were also manifest signs of the expanding strength and daring of the guerrilla movement. Attacks were going a bit too far lately. They had to be put down ; and with some firmness. The general officer who had visited the colonel's post had expressed that opinion—and not pleasantly. He seemed to have laboured under a delusion that, in some manner, all the blame rested upon the colonel. The colonel didn't know his business. He wasn't drastic enough. The colonel fancied he could be drastic with any man. He had all the tricks at his fingers' ends. His mind was dwelling upon some sweet details of the great

war of 1904. His little eyes glittered coldly with the thoroughness of the thought.

He turned his head to speak over his shoulder to the major.

"We'll have to make examples 'f these fellers," he said decisively.

"Oh yes," answered the major noncommittally.

"Evidence pretty obvious," said the colonel. "Seems all in order."

The talkative lieutenant put in :

"Seems absolutely in order, sir."

The colonel gave him exactly no attention. His hard glance was dwelling upon the men with a sort of sensual malevolence.

"Well," he said, in a hard voice, "that's what we'll do, we'll make damn good examples of 'em. These beasts are going a bit too far. We'll have to put 'em down hard 'r else we'll have the whole buggy country-side in arms. We'll teach 'em a good stiff lesson. We'll put a stop to this blinkin' brigandage." He observed the men with icy hate. "Sergeant," he whipped out, without changing his pose.

The sergeant came forward and the colonel began to speak to him in flat tones.

Rafael Brun winced a little and drew back

GUERRILLAS THEY CAUGHT 211

amongst the leaves of the spinney, sitting upon his heels. He put out his hand and closed it upon Agnes's shoulder. Agnes's eyes left the scene before them to rest upon Brun's face. Brun leant forward and said to her, with great gentleness :

" Dear . . . will you go back, a little, into the bushes and lie down ? "

She lifted her body a fraction on her slim arms and looked at him full with her candid eyes. He could see the faint trembling of her lips and knew she was afraid. Her dark hair had tumbled about her ears and neck. With the startling whiteness of her skin and the darkness of her great, fearful eyes she had a wild and wood-sprite loveliness. Brun was magnetized by the Psyche-like allure of her slim figure even at a moment like this—and terribly afraid for it. He repeated :

" Please do go back into the bushes——"

She had been watching him in silence with parted lips and an upward and characteristic lift of her chin that showed the warm, thin sweep of her throat. She asked :

" Why ? "

" Well, I ask you," he told her.

" Is there going to be . . . something I should not see ? " she asked.

"Yes, that's it, Agnes."

Her eyes left his face to gaze across the field. In a meadow some hundred yards away there was a group of soldiers about three pinioned civilians. On an embankment about twenty paces away from this group there were more soldiers, busily hammering hop-poles into the ground.

"Is it in connexion with these men?" she asked, and Brun, true to his philosophy of half truths, told her.

"Yes, dear . . . now will you go and lie . . . ?"

"What are they going to do to them . . . ?"

Brun tried to force her back gently.

"Please," he said. "Please—Agnes."

"Are they going to shoot them?"

Brun made a deprecatory gesture.

"I ask you to go back, Agnes," he said.

"Why don't you——?"

"Are they going to shoot them?"

Brun lifted his shoulders in despair.

"Yes," he said. He heard the breath sucked through her teeth with a little indrawn hiss. For a moment she closed her eyes as though overcome by a great faintness. Her body shuddered in rigor.

"Will you go now?" Brun asked.

His fiancée opened her eyes and stared at

GUERRILLAS THEY CAUGHT 213

the groups of men in long glances. Her body was still shuddering with a helpless movement. He could see the hammering jerk of the heart-beats at the base of her throat—her blouse had been torn loose—where it sank into the warm white of her shoulders. Her lips were loose-hung in horror.

"No," she whispered. "No. No, don't make me go, Rafael. It would be more terrible back there—listening. And then I ought to see—I should know and understand what it all means. You mustn't hide these things from me any longer. It is unfair to keep me ignorant. It is unfair to keep anyone ignorant. If we do not know exactly what it is going to mean to us—this ghastly invasion—how can we be expected to regard it as an affair of first importance? If the horrible facts are not brought to our notice how are we to know there are any to bring? We are too casual about this hideous thing."

"Agnes," said Brun, "you can't face this. Come away."

"No," said Agnes. "We have brought this upon ourselves, let us face it." She looked steadily down upon the men, her white teeth biting into her lips.

The men now stood by the poles. They had

finished hammering and now they posed in curious idleness about them. They had the casual, peaceful look of workmen who had paused, with tools still dangling in hand, for the moment to look at something interesting passing in the street. Their attitudes were ironical in the light of events. Still more ironical were these hop-poles that were to be the gibbet. To the simple, upright shafts of the poles had been lashed other poles, forming—crosses.

The men about the three civilians now began to bustle with brisk and circumstantial energy. They seemed determined to make the most of things and to turn this horrible little incident into a grim pageantry of arbitrary death.

Three bodies of about ten men each paraded and halted, each body facing one of the crosses. Another body, grouped with all military formulæ about the three prisoners, swung to face the crosses and proceeded at a quick march across the open space towards them. They halted at the embankment. In an abrupt and flashing manner the prisoners were flung at the crosses and men were about them, lashing them firmly with a well-directed and pent fury of speed. In half a minute the three men were hanging in their various limp angles from their supports, and their captors had vanished as

though commanded by the magic of their overlordling genii, into thin air.

There followed a short, hateful pause in which all concerned deliberately did nothing. Somebody had to give a command and he was anxious that all present should have time concentratedly to observe the magnificence of his delivery.

The firing party stared across the grass at their victims with deadly, apathetic eyes. The talkative lieutenant began to thump a clod of earth to powder with his heel. The silence seemed as perceptible as a fabric and as eternal as doom. One of the crucified wretches began a thin and spitting chattering. An atavistic wave had engulfed his personality so that he mowed like an ape. He was luckier than his two companions. They were still sane. A sword flashed down in a glittering half-circle. At once the hissing snap of the firing commenced.

The firing parties did not shoot in volleys. They fusilladed. Each shot was distinct and individual and took its turn, rapping out at a mathematic interval after the preceding shot. The smashing and immediate death of volley firing was too prompt and gentle a method for these annoying ruffians. Something more

salutary and aweing was necessary, therefore the firing party shot them to death by fragments. The sparkle of firing chased along the gun-barrels, up and down, up and down, in a vile and awful fugue of vengeance. At each telling pot-shot the wriggling victims kicked and jerked like wire-string puppets. The flat sounding "phutt" of the striking bullets could be heard above the firing. One of the men was screaming in an abandoned and unrestrainable manner as though he had lost complete control of vocal organs. A bullet smashed him in the face and he was very silent. There was somebody with a kind heart amongst the firing party.

This staccato pot-shooting continued for several minutes. Then a whistle blew and it shut off with a jerk. Two extremely active officers at once jumped from the grouping of soldiery and ran whole-heartedly to the riddled victims. A stouter man followed more slowly.

These men examined the rent bodies of the hanging men as those examining interesting specimens. The stout man felt and prodded them in places with practised and knowledgeable fingers. He looked like one accustomed to prizing sheep. When they had examined the last man they turned lugubrious faces to the

firing parties. They waved their hands in vast explanatory gestures. Their attitudes proclaimed as definitely as loud voices that "You muckers down there don't know your business. You haven't been able to kill these idiots yet." They moved from the line of fire with expressive shrugs that expressed disassociation with these fool fellow-men who couldn't slaughter idiots. A whistle blew and the hissing crack of the firing began all over again. The third victim came out of his cloud of stoicism and began to scream in short, hoarse yappings.

Brun felt a movement at his elbow and turned his horror-held gaze from the massacring, to the form of his sweetheart. She lay with her face thrust down into the mould as though she had intended to bury her body deep into the kindly shelter of the placid earth. Her frame was convulsed with the wavering shudders of a tremendous nausea. Unfortunately, she had not fainted.

CHAPTER XX

RAPE

RAFAEL BRUN put out his hand to that place in the darkness where he fancied Agnes to be. His fingers overestimated the distance the veriest trifle, so that they closed upon her shoulder with the sudden abruptness of the unexpected, and, as they touched, he felt her flesh instinctively shudder beneath them and then the quick, shrinking movement of withdrawal.

Something in her movement gave him an intangible pain. This action seemed so much to be an active expression of all that must have gone forward within her during the silent afternoon. Her instinctive hatred for a race of men who had slaughtered men. He asked in an even voice :

“ We had better be going, Agnes, if you think you can walk. Do you think you can manage to walk, Agnes ? ”

He felt the woman get up beside him : she said nothing. The leaves rustled and hissed

about her clothing as she moved. The man who was accustomed to take pleasure in lengthy, soft silences when in her company, now discovered this one to be intolerable. Some demon impulse within him urged him incessantly to speak and wipe away this gloomy vapour of quietness. He began a long, rambling and unfervent explanation of the things they were to do.

"It's best to go now, I think," he began. "We won't be seen in this darkness. They're only a small body and won't have pickets far afield. If we're careful we'll get away very easily. We have to be careful, that's all. . . . Creep along after me like this—that's it—bend as much as possible so that you don't show above the bushes. . . ."

They went along with slipping, nimble steps, through the bushes of the spinney and then out into a field and along under a hedge. The night was crowded with rustling, whispering shadows that made them timid. Armies were hidden in every clump of leafage.

They came at last to a wide-flung emptiness where the hedge dwindled away into nothingness, and before them there was a vast expanse of fresh land fading into a vague horizon of green-black trees. They stopped here as

though some stern and insurmountable wall had unexpectedly barred all progress. They stood looking across the open expanse with anxious, narrowing eyes. There was something brooding and sinister in the astonishing emptiness of this place, as if it had been predestined to ugly things. From an indefinite somewhere there came the muffled clamour of men either talking or quarrelling together.

Brun sat down on his heels and endeavoured, as a man peering under smoke, to find some decisive landmark in this ominous gloom of night. He had the driven and exasperated expression of the man who is ready to quarrel with somebody for having, himself, lost the way. In a moment his head pressed forward quickly, the jaw taking a tense rigidity. He looked like a pointer who had seen the bird he was to mark. He turned, thrusting the fingers of the left hand into the ground to support himself. Without rising, he said to Agnes :

“ I think I know where I am. The road’s down there ”—his hand indicated the vague trees. “ We get on that and bear away, y’ know, to the left. There’s a village about seven miles away, we should get to that some time. I don’t suppose they’d have touched that, and—any-

how, it's somewhere to go. . . . We might pick up news of the others—my mother—they went that way, I should say."

The girl stirred a little by him. She nodded her head with the least perceptible inclination. Fancying that insufficient, she cleared her throat and spoke for the first time. Her voice had the harsh edge of a voice not used for long periods.

"Yes," she said, "I think they must have gone that way."

The man nodded as though her remark confirmed a long process of thought.

"Oh, well then," he said. "Let's get along as hard as we can go to the place." He got up and stole forward with swift, silky caution. It was as well to be careful, he admonished her, although he fancied they were right out of range.

They went along at a gait that was full of starts and stops and timid runs across the soft, feline shadows of the great field. Their feet broke the loose earth with incredible clamour. Their breath beat from their bodies in great piston-like jets. They did their best to stifle the noise of this by holding their breaths for long periods.

As they came to the fringe of trees, shadows began to gather about them with thick, engulf-

ing suggestions of terrible menace. There was a palpable, breathing malevolence about this part of the night that oppressed them like a net of silk. They walked forward, cringing as those expectant of a descending sword blade. Their bodies were bathed in a filming wet of perspiration. Brun put his hand into that of Agnes. He found it as damp and as soft as wet moss. He said, to reassure her:

"There must be a way out through these trees, we'll find it in a minute. This dark confuses."

Agnes dragged at his hand in a little pause of terror.

"No," she whispered, "one moment . . . wait. . . . I thought. . . . Did you hear voices then? I thought . . ."

"Come on," said Brun.

He pulled her so that they might pass round an angle in the thick hedge and so come to the road. They went round the corner of the hedge, on to a lawn, and into the midst of a group of men sprawling round a dripping barrel.

As Brun and his fiancée came into the radius of the feeble light of the single lantern hanging on the house wall, the soldiers faced them, with a crisp, mechanical alertness that even advanced

inebriation could not smother. The mugs of raw spirit dropped from their hands, and they presented their rifle muzzles with deadly intention. They felt with clumsy, drink-stiffened fingers unhandily about the cut-offs of their rifles. Their elbows curved back to reach for cartridges. Their heads were thrust forward and their shoulders humped with an infinite aggression. They glared at the advancing pair with sodden, vindictive eyes. Whisky had filled the world for them with waspish and mean enemies. They called out harsh commands, bidding the pair stop.

"Who the 'ell are you?" one asked.

And:

"Stop where you dam well are, or we'll blow you into hell."

And a voice from the rear of the group abruptly said:

"Not our fellers, they're them bloody brigands, look out, boys." The speaker hiccuped badly.

Brun called out to reassure them.

"It's all right. We are perfectly peaceful. We're unarmed. We're non-combatants . . . it's all right——"

A man stepped forward. All the ponderous serious of the drunken shadowed his brow.

He explained his remarks with many thick gestures and hiccups.

"No mor' monn'y tricks now. No monn'y tri's. If yo' try any monn'y tricks——"

A voice called out :

"Say, ole man, one uv them's a woman. One of them's a woman. A woman, see !"

The eyes of all these men swung to regard Agnes with a level and calculating gaze. There was something peculiarly horrid in their animal-like look. Brun experienced a sensation of intense sickness. He suddenly felt that all these men were thinking disgusting and evil thoughts. Sleek, foul gleams seemed to shine in their eyes. He tried to break up this atmosphere.

"We surrender ourselves to you," he said, in a shrill voice. "We've been wandering about, lost, and we surrender——"

The eyes did not leave Agnes.

"Nice woman," said one of the men. "Nice and thin. I like thin women."

And another said :

"She's got a pretty mouth—hey, boys ? Give us a kiss, my dear."

Agnes shrank back as though stung. A man advanced. In his gait was all the exaggerated gallantry of the drunken. He made vague

amorous gestures with his hands. The others crowded forward also. They disputed his right to Agnes in loud, coarse hill-men's tones. They spoke with ugly and unlovely suggestion.

Brun placed himself between the drunken crew and the girl. He was conscious of a horror at the inadequacy of his one frail person for resistance in a case like this. Some cold, slimy and enervating nausea was coiled round the mainsprings of his being. He felt that he was inadequate. He stood in the way of the lewd, advancing drunkards and he felt that his body did not block up enough space. His arms and fists were feeble instruments in the dealing of just blows. But he faced the men and endeavoured to cow them by a subterfuge of extraordinary fierceness. He bade them get back, whilst over his shoulder he bade Agnes run.

"Run," he called. "Agnes, for God's sake, do run."

His cries were as futile as his physical interposition. They were too late. The soldiery came at him at a lurching run. They were full of intoxicated hilarity at his absurd feebleness. They jeered at him. One of them, a big fellow, raised a great fist, and

dashed him aside, and then in a scuffle they had Agnes.

Many things happened with incredible yet clear-cut rapidity.

Brun fell to the ground, rolled over and sprang up again. Three yards away he saw Agnes struggling in the clutch of the soldiery. She made the helpless, soft, fluttering movements of an imprisoned bird. She beat frantically against the iron muscles of these men in wild and hopeless effort to be free. The men found intense amusement in her struggles. They held her about the body with their arms, and one was trying to kiss her. There was an indescribable indecency in all their gestures. A great hand went out and began tearing at her blouse. In a moment it ripped, and Brun caught the faint ivory shimmer of her breasts. The soldiers laughed again. Brun plunged madly at the writhing crowd. A man turned about and shouted :

“ Look out, here’s that fellow.”

A man jumped aside and snatched up a rifle. His arm swung it. The brass-bound butt flickered in the light before Brun’s eyes. Something struck him on the forehead with a stupendous smash. The world blazed light and spat hissing fire. He heard Agnes’s voice

raised in a long, pitiful call: "No. Don't——"
she called. "If you are men—don't, oh, don't.
Don't. O—oh——"

He heard the harsh, cruel laugh of men who
are not to be baulked. He was engulfed in the
darkness of the tomb.

CHAPTER XXI

DEATH

THE Commander-in-Chief sat at a table in the midst of his staff. He was receiving and despatching immense quantities of communications with a fine calmness. He was a big, immutably silent man, with a dry-looking face. His thin lips had awful determination. One got the impression that it would be impossible for him to close his eyes except in sleep. He had the bright, unwinking retinæ of a bird. They looked like polished jet.

Although this was the evening of a peculiarly exacting day at the height of a yet undecided modern campaign, he performed his duties with conserved and precise actions which told of a body and mind acutely balanced for the pursuit of abnormal labours.

The Commander sat at a table that had been placed before a big, squarish tent. In front of him stretched a flat, open space that had once been vividly and stingingly green, but

which had now turned to dun under the sun and the trampling of many men coming and going. Beyond this space and for a great distance ran many little tents in neat lines. These tents, too, were upon all sides of this open space as the houses of a town are set about its main square. These tents were laid out in streets like those of an up-to-date city. That is, they were laid out with the wisdom for utility of a blind devotee to mathematics. They were fully inhabited.

Thus always this general had men, had soldiers swarming about him. They were the same soldiers but not the same men that had been about him a few weeks back. The fret and fray of battles had taken some of the sprightly newness from their glitter, some of the jaunty rawness from their movements. They now moved, gaunt men of surprising quietness and confident furtiveness in old, dirty but workmanlike uniforms, among the tents. The number of absolutely necessary things they found they could now do without was surprising. They had become veterans.

The general worked on in his quick, well-oiled way, until a great bulk of papers before him had dissolved into nothingness. When he had signed and handed away the last of these

to the waiting orderlies he lay back in his chair. He stretched his back with luxury. His hands were folded one over the other at the level of his breast, and he looked over them through the interminable range of tents. His eyes rested upon a patch of black-green trees and a farm roof glittering like a red gem in the leafy bosom. His face was hard and inscrutable, but he seemed sad and tired. It was like a face of granite that had stood firm and unyielding in many gales, yet showed some of the wearying fret and distaste of the storms it had lived through. The ghastly tiredness of his whole spirit was more apparent in this relaxed moment when he sat back at ease looking at the serene green of the trees, the bucolic suggestion of that red farm roof. He had the air of a man weighing the farmhouse against the tents.

He roused himself after a few minutes. He turned his head in a quick, birdlike glance. He spoke briskly to an *aide*.

"Let's have that fellow out," he said.

The *aide* swung about and signalled across the clearing. At once a bustle took life round a tent that had been under armed guard. A man was dragged from it. A file of infantry formed about him as if by magic. They all came stepping briskly towards the general's table.

The general and his staff watched the prisoner all the way to them with long, keen glances. They already knew all about him. He had slain two men and devastated half a section of cavalry with a hedging-hook, and he had done so with every symptom of violent hatred that was akin to madness. He had surprised these troopers about an inn and had done his fell work even before they could retaliate. There was possibly something inexplicable underlying it all, the general half thought. The man's action had been singular. He had also talked of great wrongs done him. However interesting as root-motive these things might be, the general had no time for such subtleties. What he knew was that the man had killed two troopers. That, as a civilian, he had no right to kill troopers.

He watched him coming towards him under guard ; his officers watched him.

There was no curiosity in their eyes. They did not regard him as some strange and unclassified anthropological subject. Constant familiarity with his genus had taught them to classify him. He was that pest, the non-combatant fighter. A nuisance to be exterminated.

Rafael Brun stood before the General Officer's

table. His air was not abject, it was acutely miserable. His figure was no longer plump but pitiable. He was no longer a self-content, self-sufficing person evading everything. He was a person conscious of everything because everything had been forced upon his consciousness. It had crushed him. But as usual he was a man not longing to face things, only longing to escape. He would rather be crushed than convinced.

The General Officer spoke in an even voice. He was asking Brun if he had anything to say. Rafael Brun, with a wrench, remembered he had many things to say. He strove to say them. But when he came to Agnes, and Agnes's bitter hour, he saw red as he had seen red when he struck the troopers. His pleading dissolved into a cloud of incoherence and hate.

The general shrugged his shoulders. The men who came to him frequently defended themselves with wild stories. These stories might be true. It was not for him, however, to waste time probing out truth. He was here to put down armed resistance, and the way to put down armed resistance in war was to wage war. If he listened to stories, was lenient, he would have half the country-side up against

him. They would take him for a soft fool to be played with. All he had got to show these men was, that he was going to keep them under.

It was hard on them, perhaps, but then war was a hard creed. Things had to be sacrificed if its end was to be attained.

He was calling Brun to order.

"Yes, yes," he said smoothly. "Yes. But how do I know if this is all true? This woman now—what about her? Where is she?"

Brun shrunk back. His natural instinct asserted itself. He felt that if he thought where Agnes was he'd go mad. He said nothing.

The general's fingers left the level of his breast. They spread in a small deprecatory gesture. They said as plainly as words might say: "Well, if that's all you can bring in your defence——"

Rafael Brun was stung by the finality of the gesture. He burst out:

"I don't know. I don't know where she is. When I came to myself she was gone. Gone." He paused. He seemed in terrible pain. "I walked about a little. I was dazed. Then I saw those troopers. I remembered and I went mad."

"Yes," said the general smoothly. "That was when you killed those two men. You admit that?"

Brun admitted it.

"Yes, I killed them." A gust of rage fumed in him. "My God, I killed them. I wanted to kill them all. All. The foul and blasted devils."

The general waved a hand.

"You admit it," he said; "that is all we wanted to know."

Brun perceived the terror of it.

"But," he whispered, "but—look what I'd been through. Look at what—what they'd done. How I felt about it."

"Still you killed them; and you're not a soldier."

"It was only natural," shrilled Brun.

"That may be so. The consequences are only natural also—in war."

Rafael Brun looked at the general. He was, for the first time, perhaps, in his life, facing things squarely. He was facing war. This relentless thing he hadn't troubled about, this thing he had permitted to descend upon him without a thought was going to kill him. It had killed, or worse than killed, all that he loved most in the world. Now it was going to

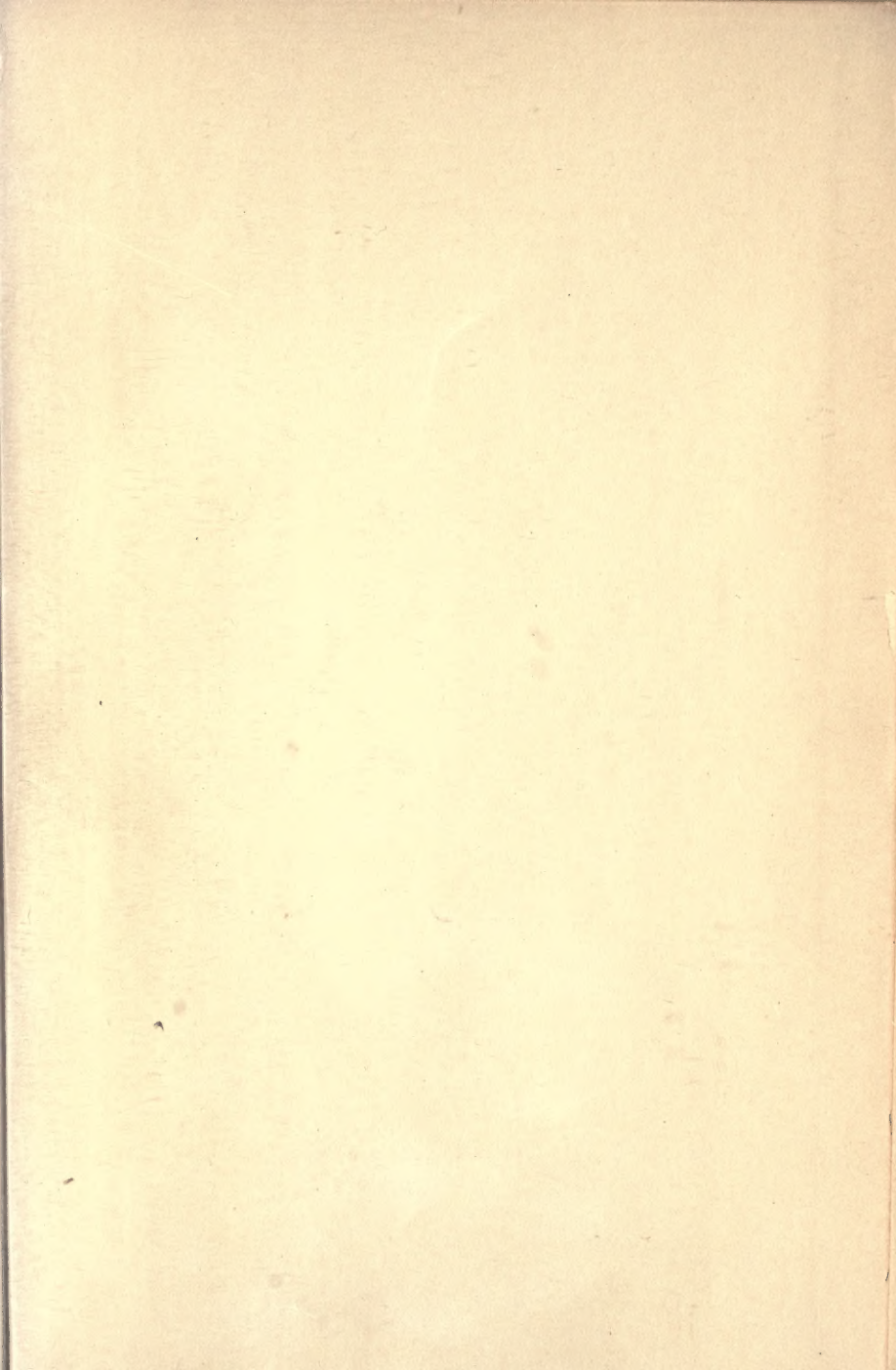
kill him. In a clear light he saw that it was his own fault. He had ignored it all along, he had refused to recognize the fact that it could touch him. He might have faced it in its beginnings and prevented it, for it is always easier to prevent in the beginning. But from sheer inertia and incomprehension he had not troubled to prevent it. It had grown up and now it was going to destroy him. The climax was inevitable. He saw all the men in this stricken country-side who might have banded together, to prevent what had happened, and so lived, and all the men were like him. They hadn't seen any reason. They hadn't troubled. They had written their own doom as he had written his. He bowed his head. He accepted his just punishment. He would die, not because he had killed two troopers, but because he had permitted a state of things in which he had been doomed to kill two troopers. He bowed his head.

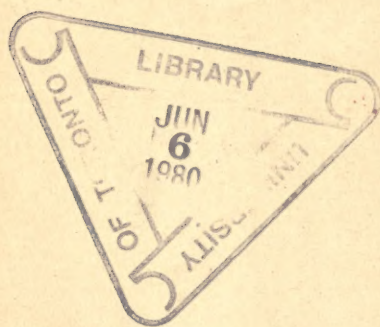
"If I had only known, he said. "If I had only foreseen."

As the firing party stepped briskly away the General Officer lay back in his chair. His eyes found the black-green trees again, the red roof shining like a gem in the leaves' bosom. His eyes were tired and sad. He was wondering

why people refused to know these things, refused to foresee.

A thin rip of rifles slashed out in the quiet air. Another wretch had paid the price of ignorance.





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